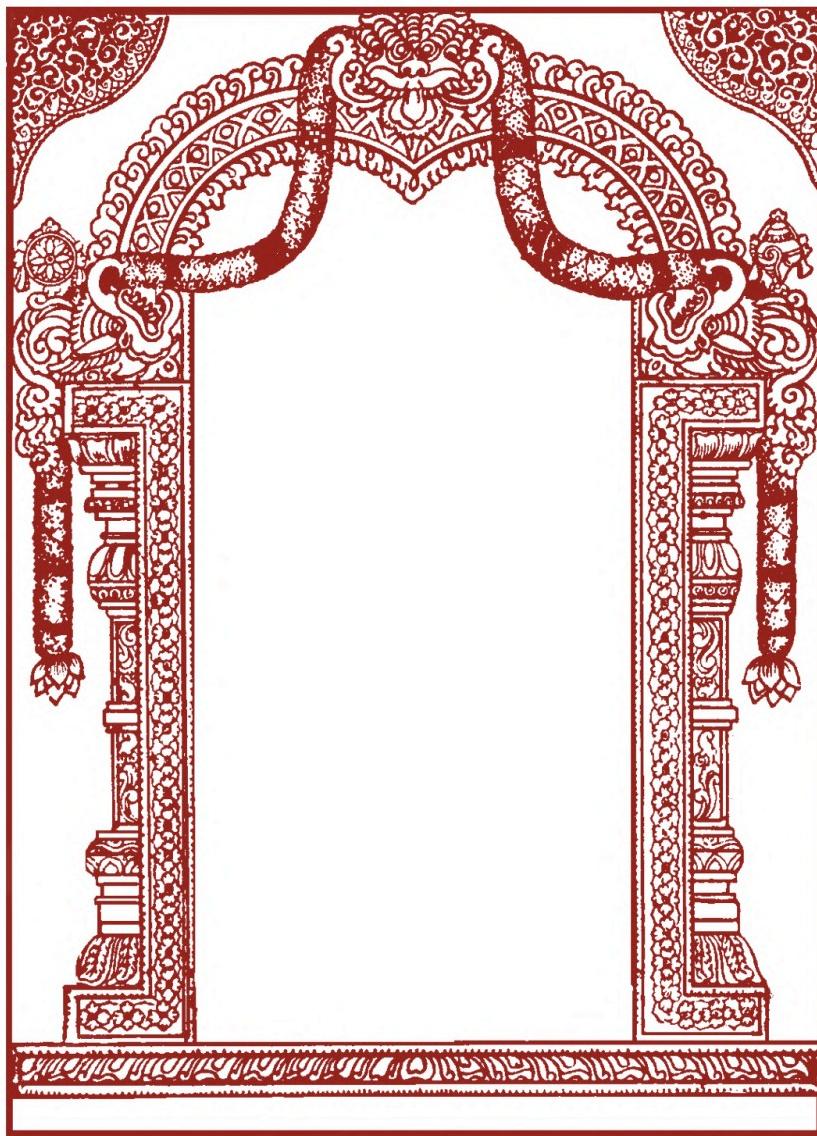


# HINDU ICONOLOGY

The study of the symbolism and meaning of Icons



by

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# HINDU ICONOLOGY — INTRODUCTION

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**Definition;** Icon (*ikon*) is a word derived from the Greek and is defined as an image or representation of a religious figure. *Iconology* is the study of icons.

Everything connected with the Hindu icon has a symbolic meaning; the posture, gestures, ornaments, number of arms, weapons, vehicle, consorts and associate deities (parivāra devatā). Symbolic meanings of various rituals and paraphernalia are first given in the Brāhmaṇas and Aranyakas, and later the iconic symbols are explained in the various Purāṇas such as Srimad Bhāgavatam (S.B.), Viṣṇu Purāṇa (V.P.), Śiva Purāṇa; Upaniṣads such as Gopāla-uttara-tāpini Upaniṣad (G.U.T.Up), Kṛṣṇa Upaniṣad (K.U.) and Āgamas.

## Iconology

Iconology is defined as the study of the symbolism behind sacred images. One of the most prominent tools of devotion in Hinduism is the use of images. These images or icons are made of wood, stone, metal or painted on cloth. The term generally used by non-Hindus and unfortunately by Hindus themselves when referring to these sacred images is IDOL. This term is actually *pejorative* — a demeaning, insulting word first used by Christian missionaries who perceived Hinduism in an extremely negative way — describing us as pagans, heathens and idolaters.

The use of images is also predominant among Catholics and Eastern Orthodox Christians who refer to sacred images as ICONS to differentiate them from the ‘idols’ of the heathens.

An icon can be defined as a sacred symbol which embodies a spiritual truth and is worthy of veneration and contemplation.

All Hindu icons are visual representatives of the transcendent Divine and the Spiritual Forces which support, sustain and direct the Cosmos. The art and symbology of Icons has been developed to an extremely sophisticated degree by the Hindu mind. Each and every feature of an icon has a profound truth behind it, and all the mystical teachings of the sages are presented to the spiritual seekers through the means of these icons and symbols.

The language of symbols develops when an attempt is made to represent something that is beyond the normal capacity of the human mind to comprehend or to express. A transcendent reality is expressed in terms of equivalents known as symbols.

All of human interaction is carried out through the use of symbols. To represent a quantity of something we use symbols called *numbers*. To articulate and communicate ideas we use symbols known as *words*. To transmit words to others in a graphic manner we use the symbology of *letters* of the alphabet.

A symbol can be natural or conventional. When we perceive a direct relationship between one order of things with another a natural symbol develops.

In Hindu cosmology, symbolism is the expression of reality. It is the expression of the particular points where two realms meet — the transcendental (*niskala*) with the material (*sakala*).

The Āgamas affirm 2 core tenets;—

1. the material realm (*sakala*) is a reflection of the transcendental realm (*niskala*) and
2. the inner spiritual/psychic world is related with the outer (*yathā brahmāṇḍa tathā piṇḍāṇḍa*)

and therefore symbolism arises from nature itself and is not the result of speculation. And through the contemplation of the outer symbols one reaches the innermost subtle concepts behind those symbols.

However far back we reach in Indian thought as a whole we find a coherent use of symbols

to represent the abstract. The whole of Indian iconology is built up upon a code of symbols based on the assumption that there exists a natural affinity between ideas (*nāma*) and forms (*rūpa*).

This code of symbols has been transmitted over thousands of years and its origins are lost in the remote past.

Symbols do not speak to the rational mind and cannot be fully understood by logic, they are the subject of contemplation, worship, assimilation, inner experience and ultimate spiritual realization. Symbols are the esoteric language of the unconscious mind.

## The technique of Icons

*Brahma-vid āpnoti param — Taittiriya Upaniṣad.*

One who contemplates upon the Brahman attains the Supreme.

The Upaniṣads prescribe many techniques for spiritual advancement but the most prominent of them is *upāsana*. Upāsana (*upa* + *āsana*) literally means – ‘sitting near’ and refers to the act of meditation. The term *upāsana* can be translated as worship, contemplation, devotion, the making of offerings etc.

The icons are primarily used for this practice of *upāsana*. They not merely "representations" of the Godhead but are in fact a "focus" or "locus" of the presence of the Godhead. This means that God is actually present in the icons.

How is this doctrine justified? Firstly God is *omnipresent* (all-pervading), *omniscient* (all-knowing) and *omnipotent* (all-powerful). The entire creation is pervaded by the Godhead, there is no place or thing in this universe which is devoid of the presence of God. So naturally it follows that the Godhead is also present in the icon. When the icon is properly consecrated according to the prescribed rites — God is implored to be especially present in the icon out of compassion and love so that we in turn may love and adore Him/Her.

Secondly God is the Inner-witness who knows our every thought and emotion, and Scripture tells us that God always responds to our devotion. So God with a small fraction of His limitless being takes up residence in the consecrated icon in a very special and specific way, and because by definition God is omnipotent — all-powerful, this empowering of the icon is certainly no great effort on his part!!

The Divine is all-pervading and intimately close. The entire universe is pervaded within and without by Divinity. The Divine cannot be confined to the icon because of omniscience but through the power of *mantras* (sacred formulae) and *mudras* (ritual gestures) the Divine Essence is invoked into the icon and It, through Its infinite mercy condescends to take residence in the gross object for the purpose of receiving the worship of devotees and bestowing Grace. In other words the divine Presence is *particularized* or *focused* in the icon. The energy that is already there is awakened, it does not enter from somewhere outside. The image of stone or brass is thus

transformed into a *living entity*. Its actual shape and ornamentation are symbolic and convey meaning in every single aspect. Once the invocation ceremony (*prana-*

*pratishtha*) has been performed, the icon is no longer regarded as merely 'symbolic' but as a **mūrti** which means '*a materialization or embodiment of the Divine*.

## TERMINOLOGY.

In Sanskrit there is a very rich terminology that is used when referring to icons;

<b>bera</b>	— image
<b>mūrti</b>	— anything which has definite shape and physical limits, an embodiment or incarnation.
<b>bimba</b>	— reflection or prototype — the original or model after which a thing is copied (the Original Being of course is God)
<b>vigraha</b>	— extension, expansion, form.
<b>pratima</b>	— resemblance, similitude, representation
<b>pratīka</b>	— symbol
<b>rūpa</b>	— form, aggregate, a sum total of form.
<b>arca</b>	— object of adoration and worship

If one does not have the vocabulary (*nāma*) one cannot understand an experience (*rūpa*) and if one cannot understand and define an experience to oneself, one cannot share it with others. The function of the icon is to represent, through a combination of forms and proportions, some fundamental aspect of the cosmos and its presiding consciousness which is not directly perceptible by our senses. Although these cosmic realities cannot be *perceived*, they can be *experienced*, the icons are the vocabulary whereby we interpret the experience of the divine to ourselves and convey that understanding to others.

## Theological and Scriptural support for the use of icons.

*na ca rūpam vinā dhyātum kenapi śakyate ||  
sarva rūpa nivṛttā hi buddhiḥ kutrāsyā tiṣṭhati |  
nivṛttā glāyate buddhir nidrayā vā parīyate ||  
tasmād vidvān upāśīta buddhyā sākaram eva tam |  
asti tasya parokṣam tad iti kiñcid anusmaret ||  
sarvathā akāram uddiṣṭam na parityajya pāṇḍitah ||*

Vishnu samhita 29:55 — 57

Without a form how can God be meditated upon? If he is completely formless, where will the mind fix itself? When there is nothing for the mind to attach itself to it will slip away from meditation, or will glide into a state of slumber. Therefore the wise will meditate on some form, remembering however that it is an indirect method, a particularization or indication of that which is completely formless.

Hindu theology affirms that the Supreme Being is a Personal God/Goddess but at the same time declares that His/Her form is **undefinable** (*anirdeśya*), **incomprehensible** (*acintya*) and **infinite** — i.e. unconditioned by Time and Space (*ananta*). We should not

think of the “Personality” of God in human terms – like a great Sultan in the Sky!

In the Vishnu Samhita 29; 49b — 58. It is pointed out that it is beyond the capabilities of an average human being to adequately conceive of the Supreme Person for the

purpose of contemplation. The human mind relies on concepts and forms and contrasts, in order to focus its thinking processes.

Without a definitive content, the mind wanders and contemplation becomes impossible. So therefore the Āgamas have

prescribed the use of symbols for focusing the mind and providing content upon which to meditate. This content itself must be meaningful, in order to bring about the required change of consciousness.

In the Parama Samhita 3:7 it is stated;

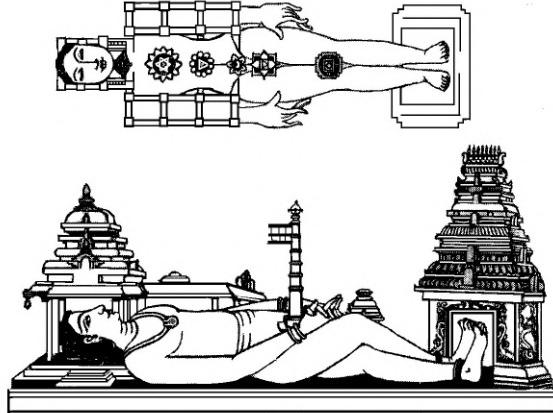
*nirākāre tu deveśe na arcanam sambhave nṛṇām |  
na ca dhyānam na ca stotram tasmāt sākāram arcayet ||*

It is impossible for the human being to worship, meditate or praise a deity without form. Therefore the Lord should be worship through an icon.

The Sriprashna Samhita 18;1 affirms that the descent of the Lord into a permanent iconic abode is due to His Divine Initiative alone, for bestowing grace and blessing upon the devotees

## The Temple Structure and Icons.

The human body is the temple for the Indwelling Spirit of God (*Antaryamin*). All the various parts of the temple structure correspond to various parts of the human body. The temple is the physical body which houses the presence of Divine. So the actual building of the temple itself is a symbol of the presence of the Divine in the world. The temple with all its intricate imagery represents the universe in all its variety and just as on the macrocosmic scale the universe is the *body* of the Divine



so on a microcosmic scale when the icon represents the manifested Godhead; the temple is It's Body.

## Types of Icons.

Two types of icons are encountered in the temple. There is the main deity which is usually carved out of stone or sometimes in the case of very large icons such as in Srirangam temple they are molded out of plaster. This is known as the *mūla vigraha*, and once installed can never be removed — this icon receives all the daily services. The second type of icon is known as the *proxy icon* (*utsava vigraha*). It is smaller than the

main icon and is usually constructed of an alloy of 5 metals (*panca-loha*). During festivals the Spiritual Energy [*shakti*] from the main icon is transferred temporarily into the proxy icon which is then taken out in procession and receives particular services.

The icons for use in the home for daily worship are either pictures or metal images. Metal images, when used for worship should be about 14 cms high.

## Classification of Icons;

1. Āgamic Icons fall into three broad groups they are;

<b>citra</b>	sculptured in the round.
<b>citrārdha</b>	base-relief
<b>citrabhāsa</b>	painted

2. Those that are sculptured in the round can be classified according to movability as;

<b>cala</b>	movable,
<b>acala</b>	immovable,
<b>calācala</b>	both movable and immovable.

3. They are also classified according to temperament;

<b>śanta or saumya</b>	those of a peaceful demeanor
<b>vīra</b>	Those of an heroic nature
<b>raudra or ugra</b>	those of a terrifying nature.

4. The immovable icons are known as **dhruba-bera** or **mūla-vigraha** are classified by posture;—

<b>sthānaka</b> —	standing,
<b>āsina</b> —	sitting,
<b>śayana</b> —	reclining

5. Icons are further classified according to the purpose for which they are worshipped, different results being obtained from each type (*yad bhāvati tad bhavati* — that upon which you contemplate you become.).

**1. yoga mūrti;** These icons depict the Supreme Being in various meditational postures. They are worshipped by the aspirant desiring self-mastery or Yoga. These icons should be established and consecrated on the banks of rivers, in forests or on top of mountains, it should be quite far from human habitation, the reason being quite obviously in order to afford a peaceful and undisturbed environment in which the aspirant can practice yogic meditation.

**2. bhoga-mūrti;** These icons depict the deity in a domestic situation. This is the best suited form for worship in temples constructed in towns and places of habitation. These icons are conducive of enjoyment and happiness and can be resorted to by all classes and by people of all temperaments. The images of Uma-Maheshvara, Radha-Krishna and Lakshmi-Narayana etc. are of this type.

**3. vīra-mūrti;** These icons depict the Deity in a heroic posture such as Rama defeating Rāvana or Durga defeating Mahiṣāsura or Śiva as Naṭarāja. This type of icon bestows power and victory over enemies (such as anger, greed, delusion etc.), it can be established either in the town or outside of it.

**4. ugra-mūrti;** This is the form which is used for protection against enemies (either real or spiritual in the form of anger, delusion, desire etc.). They are characterized by sharp teeth and a large number of arms carrying various weapons, wide eyes and a

flaming halo around the head. This icon may only be set up in the North-eastern corner of the settlement or village. The setting up of an *Ugra-mūrti* in the midst of a town or city is prohibited. If it is established then a *sānta-mūrti* must be placed directly in front of it, or a tank of water should be constructed in front of the temple. The *Viśvarūpa*, *Narasimha*, *Sudarśana* and the *Vaṭa-patra-śāyin* are of the Vaiṣṇava Ugra type. Gaja-samhāra is an ugra form of Lord Śiva and Kāli dancing on Śiva, and Pratyāṅgira Devī are examples of Ugra Śaktis.

**5. abhicārika-mūrti;** used for the purpose of inflicting death and destruction on one's enemies or confounding his purposes. This form is only set up far from a town and never in a place of human habitation. (This form is purely theoretical as there are no temples of this type and no bhakta would have anything to do with them).

## Orientation of Icons

The standing and seated icons are orientated either facing the east or the west. The *sayana bera* (reclining) can face any of the four cardinal points, if facing North then the head is to the East, if facing South-the head is to the West. If facing East or West then the head is to the South. Depending on the direction of the head of the Icon differing results are obtained;

East	<i>Shantidam</i> (peace)	West	<i>pushtidam</i> (vigour)
South	<i>jayadam</i> (victory)	North	<i>abhicarikam</i> (depredation)

The *Ugra-rupa* can only be established in the North-east of the settlement where it will give prosperity and happiness, the incorrect establishing of the *ugra-rupa* in a town or village leads to the following results;

In the East	destruction of village
In the south-east	destruction of the settlement
In the South	degradation of the womenfolk
In the South-west	population will be decreased through disease
In the west	bad conduct, depression and mental anguish
In the north-west	delinquency amongst the populace
In the north	various types of afflictions.

*Narasimha* — usually the yoga form — is always set up to the west of the main sanctorum, even in Siva temples.

## Karma Bimbas;

A karma bimba is a *proxy* image of the main Icon which is used for a variety of practical purposes. The life force (prana) from the main Icon is transferred into the karma bimba for a short duration for serving the particular purpose. Thereafter it is transferred back into the main Icon.

In a temple consecrated according to the Agamas there should be three, five or six such karma-bimbas. Five are most common and are known as the **Pañca-bera**.

*dhruvam tu grāma rakṣārtham arcan artham  
tu kautukam | snānārtham snapanam*

*proktam balyartham baliberakam | utsava  
cotsavartham ca pañca-bera prakalpitāḥ ||*

**1. dhruva- bera** — the main icon in the sanctum sanctorum which is of the immovable kind, constructed of stone and permanently fixed. It protects the town

**2. kautuka-bera** the movable image used for daily offerings .

**3. snapana-bera** the icon used for the daily bathing ceremony.

**4. bali-bera** icon used for the daily *bali* offerings in the courtyard of the temple.

**5. utsava-bera** the icon which is taken out in procession on festivals.

**6. śayana-bera** the icon used for putting to rest at night

Few temples are opulent enough to possess and to handle all these five beras so the general situation is to have two beras only; the **mula-bera** and the **utsava-bera**. The *utsava-bera* fulfills the function of all the other 4 types. These *karma-bimbas* have to correspond in certain iconical forms to the *dhruva-bera*. If the *dhruva-bera* stands they stand, if the *dhruva-bera* sits they sit, but if the *dhruva-bera* reclines then the *karma-bimbas* either stand or sit. They also have to correspond in the number of arms and various other paraphernalia.

*karmārcā sarvathā kāryā mūla-bimba anusāriṇī | Viśvaksena Samhita 17; 11.*

The karma-bimbas must correspond in every way to the mula-bimba.

## Construction of Icons

In the Agamas and Silpa Sastras (canons of architecture) there are *dhyāna slokas* (visualizations) which are given; describing the exact features of the particular Deity and the paraphernalia in great detail for the purpose of meditation. It is according to these *dhyana slokas* that the icons are constructed.

Certain proportions having symbolic significance, are essential features of icons as well as of temple architecture. The image is made in strict conformity to the original canonical texts and concentration and visualization is extremely important. Any omission, error or oversight is attributed to imperfect concentration and slacking of

attention, in this case the image is discarded and the process is deferred.

The Agamas insist on the necessity of making the icon as beautiful as possible but actually even an ill-shaped image made strictly according to the Agamic directions serves the same purpose as a very artistic and beautifully executed one.

The construction is always begun upon a date set according to astrology, being an auspicious day and in harmony with the nature of the deity. The Silpi or craftsman is expected to maintain his ritual purity during the process of construction and there are several disciplines which he has to undertake until the completion of the task.

## Materials of Construction:

*kṛtvā pratnidhiṁ samyag dāru loha śilādibhiḥ |  
tat sthāpayitvā māṁ sthāne śāstra drṣena vartmanā || Padma Samhita Kriya Pada 1;5*

According to the Agamas, icons can be constructed of stone, wood, metal, clay, *kadi-sarkara* — a kind of cement, precious stones or painted on cloth. Those made in metal are usually sculptured in wax form and then cast in metal.

## Iconometry — Measurement of Icons

### **Dhruva Bera;**

The height of the *Dhruva-bera* varies. It is either taken in proportion to the temple super structure or the temple measurements are taken from the *dhruba-bera*.

### **Example 1**

The whole Icon consists of three parts; 2 parts are the Icon proper and 1 part is the pedestal. Multiply the whole length of the Icon by 4 and divide by 8. One 8th is the width of the doorway into the sanctum.

### **Example 2**

The whole length of the Icon including pedestal should be 7/ 8ths of the height of the doorway. (i.e. height + 7 x 8 = doorway). If the Icon is made 2 meters in height then the following measurements are calculated;

doorway =	2 .28 mtrs high x 1.14 mtrs in width.
Sanctum =	4.57 mtrs square
Vimana =	9.14 mtrs high
Mandapa =	9.14 mtrs wide
Plinth =	3 mtrs high

### **Proportional measurement of Karma Bimbas**

*mūla-bimba samucchrāyām dvidhā vāpi tridhāpi va |  
caturdhā vā samvibhajya eka bhāgena kalpayet ||  
utsavārcām tad ucchrāyām dvidhā vāpi tridhāpi vā |  
caturdhā vā vibhajya eka bhāgena parikalpayet ||*

īśvara Samhita 17; 242, 243.

The *karma-bimbas* should be either a quarter, a third or half of the height of the *mula-bimba*.

### **Position of the Deities in the Sanctum**

The sanctum sanctorum is called the *garbhalaya* and is divided into half. The half should again be sub-divided into 10 parts. The deities are positioned as follows;

Shiva Lingam in the 10th part i.e. center

Brahma is placed in the 9th part.

Vishnu is placed in the 8th part.

Shanmuga is placed in the 7th part.

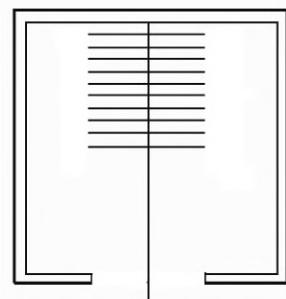
Sarasvati in the 6th.

Surya in the 5th.

Ganesha in the 4th.

Bhairava in the 3rd

Shakti in the 2nd place from the rear wall.



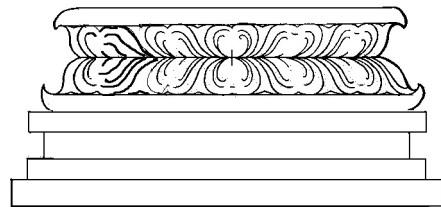
# Understanding Iconography

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There are certain features which are common to almost all Hindu deities and some Buddhist ones.

## Lotus Throne

All the gods & goddesses, buddhas and bodhisattvas are usually depicted standing or seated upon lotuses. The pure and unsullied lotus arising from the depth of the waters and far from the banks of the lake is associated with the idea of purity which arises from the

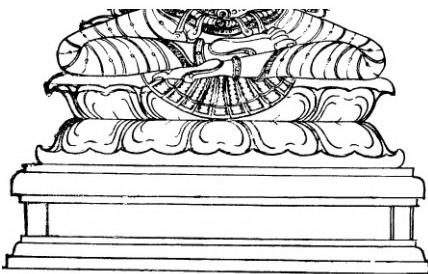


law-of-conduct (*dharma*) and wisdom (*jñana*). The Lotus is also symbolic of the enlightened mind. It rises in the mud of material existence gradually growing through the waters until it reaches the surface and then opens up to the sun in all its glory. Water splashed upon a lotus leaf never remains but immediately slips off. In the same way the dirt of worldliness never stains the enlightened being. The lotus base therefore establishes the idea that the devata or buddha contemplated is nothing but a projection of the mind, and has no existence apart from the devotee.

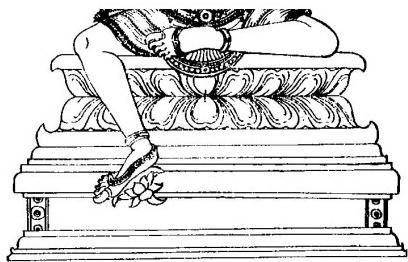
## The Postures.

The deities and buddhas are shown in various stereotyped postures, reclining, sitting with one foot raised, two feet raised or two feet down or standing.

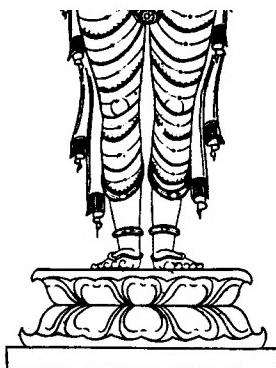
The reclining posture indicates absolute transcendence, a state of inscrutable "otherness" and is beyond all our powers of comprehension.



Seated there are three stages of manifestation being depicted. Both legs crossed in *padmasana* (lotus posture) indicate a state of transcendence with a potential for manifestation. One leg lowered indicates a concern for sentient beings, a desire to be pro-active and an intention to engage in acts of compassion and liberation. Both legs down indicates a full intention to assist the devotee and an impending act of great compassion guiding others to enlightenment.



— the closeness of our inner within our minds and the world

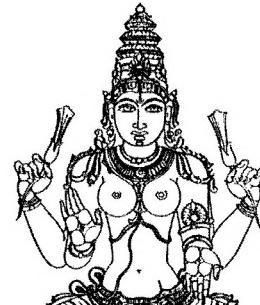


Standing indicates full manifestation within our realm and capacity to comprehend — it indicates immanence being. It is the Divine in full action in which we live.

## The Four Arms.

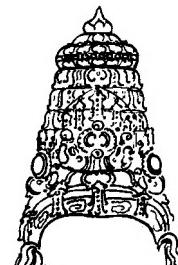
Most Hindu deities are depicted with four arms, these represent:—

- The poises or states of Reality:— *Brahman* — the Absolute all inclusive totality of being; *Īśvara* — the Personal Creative Deity, *Hirānyagarbha* — the conglomeration of individual Selves or *Jīvas*, and *Virāt* — the manifest universe.
- The cardinal directions; indicating that the god is all pervading and has perfect dominion over all the directions.
- The four divisions of society; intellectuals, administrators, entrepreneurs, and workers.
- The four stages of life; student, householder, retirement and renunciate.
- The four aspects of Hindu psychology — the lower cognitive mind (*manas*) the intellect (*buddhi*), ego (*ahamkara*) and consciousness (*cit*).
- The four levels of consciousness; waking (*jagrata*), dream (*svapna*), sub-consciousness (*sushupti*) and transcendental consciousness (*turiya*).
- The four essential components of dharma; truth (*satya*), meditation (*tapa*), compassion (*daya*), and charity (*Dana*).
- The four aims of human endeavor (*purusharthas*); pleasure (*kama*), prosperity (*artha*), righteousness (*dharma*) and liberation (*moksha*).
- The four "immeasurable" qualities — friendliness (*maitri*), compassion (*karuna*), empathetic joy (*mudita*) and non-attachment (*upeksha*).



## The Crown

The crown is the quintessential symbol of sovereignty and is also said to be indicative of the Unknowable Reality which is trying to be presented through this deity.



## The Earrings

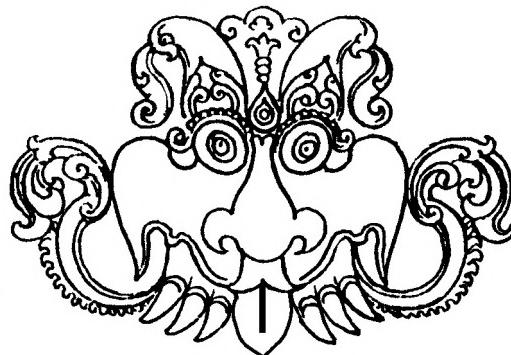
The earrings shaped like mythical sea-monsters (*makara*) represent the two methods of pursuing knowledge — intellectual knowledge (*sankhya*) and intuitive perception (*yoga*).



## The Face of Glory

Very often the deity is framed by a doorway like formation with a monster's head over the top. This is a common feature of many of doorways to the old houses, temples and palaces in India and South East Asia. This is called a *kirti-mukha* which literally means "the face-of-glory" and it represents the principle of all-consuming Time. Since Time is the great destroyer and takes from us all

that is precious and separates us from our loved ones and objects it is shown as being wrathful and terrifying. It serves to remind the contemplator that everything is conditioned by time and space and all things in the universe including the deity depicted are all subjected to appearance and disappearance. Everything is impermanent and subject to constant change.



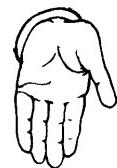
## The Gestures

The language of the hands known as *mudra* is very significant in all forms of Indian art — in dance as well as sculpture and ritual. There are some *mudras* which are common to many deities and buddhas. These are:—

**Abhaya Mudra** — *the gesture of fearlessness* — the palm displayed with the fingers pointing to the sky. Indicates the practice of harmlessness to all beings in word, deed and thought (*ahimsa*) and granting to all beings the gift of freedom from fear.



**Varada Mudra** — *the gesture of generosity* — the palm displayed, fingers pointing downwards. This indicates the benevolence of the deity as well as the teaching of the principle of generosity to all beings.



**Chin Mudra** — *the gesture of teaching* — palm displayed, fingers upwards thumb and fore-finger joined at the tips. This indicates the imparting of knowledge, form the deity to the contemplator and having received the knowledge the aspirant is expected to pass it on to others. The thumb pressing on the index finger indicates suppression of egoism, the 3 upraised fingers indicate overcoming self-referent desire, anger and greed.



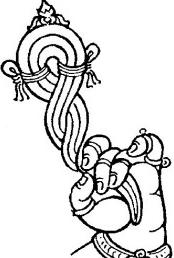
**Dhyana Mudra** — *the gesture of meditation*, this takes two forms: palms placed one over the other in the lap or arms stretched out, hands on the knees with the palms outward displaying the *chin mudra*. The former indicates meditation using an abstract or formless focus, and the later expresses the idea of meditation upon a more tangible object.



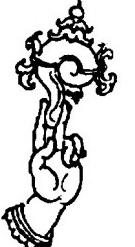
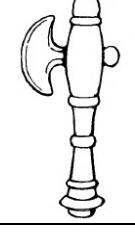
**Tarjani Mudra** — the gesture of vigilance — fist closed with the index finger raised. This mudra is usually found in images of protective or guardian deities and indicative of the need to be extremely mindful when approaching the spiritual path. The index finger is also representative of the ego which is the major obstacle to spiritual advancement. It also represents the principle of aggression and harm — aspects of personality which need to be overcome in the preparatory stages of spiritual life.

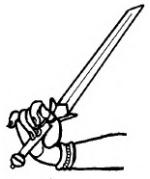


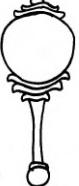
## Common Iconic Symbols

Symbol		Esoteric Meaning
	<b>Pāśa</b> Noose	The 3 bonds that bind us to the cycle of rebirth – <i>avidya</i> (ignorance) <i>karma</i> (action) <i>vasana</i> (habital patterns). It also has three other meanings attracting oneself to the Dharma, tying oneself by the constraints of Dharma and destroying all obstacles to one's spiritual evolution. (The pāśa represents the three fetters maya, karma and mala.)
	<b>Aṅkuśha</b> Elephant Goad	Incentive to continue in spiritual practice and the application of the teachings. The urging of the guru which drives us to practice and apply. Also the control of anger.
	<b>Churi</b> dagger	The spiritual path - the razor's edge which needs to be treaded with great care and vigilance.
	<b>Vīnā</b>	Inner sound of spiritual harmony; the vibration of the atoms in motion, creation, the sound of the spheres, the harmony of all the diffuse elements of the cosmos. Music and dancing — the arts.

	<b>Kamandalu</b> water jug	Fullness and generosity, also purity and purification.
	<b>Gadā</b> mace	Primarily a symbol of Vishnu but also shared among many of the deities. The mace is a symbol of sovereignty and the Cosmic Order. It also symbolises Karma the law of cause and effect.
	<b>Salipallava</b> rice-sprig	bounty of nature, fecundity and abundance.
	<b>Dhvaja</b> flag	Making oneself known to others, indicating that one is a source of charity and safety to all sentient beings. An indication of the triumph of the Dharma.
	<b>Khatvāṅga</b> club with skull	Impermanence, dissolution, also represents the 8 mystical powers obtained through yoga meditation.
	<b>Khēṭaka</b> shield	Security, defence, protection of oneself, deflection of negativity and assault by others.
	<b>Damaru</b> Hour-glass Drum	Union of the masculine and feminine and the projection of the universe through sound. When the two halves part the sound ceases and the universe dissolves.

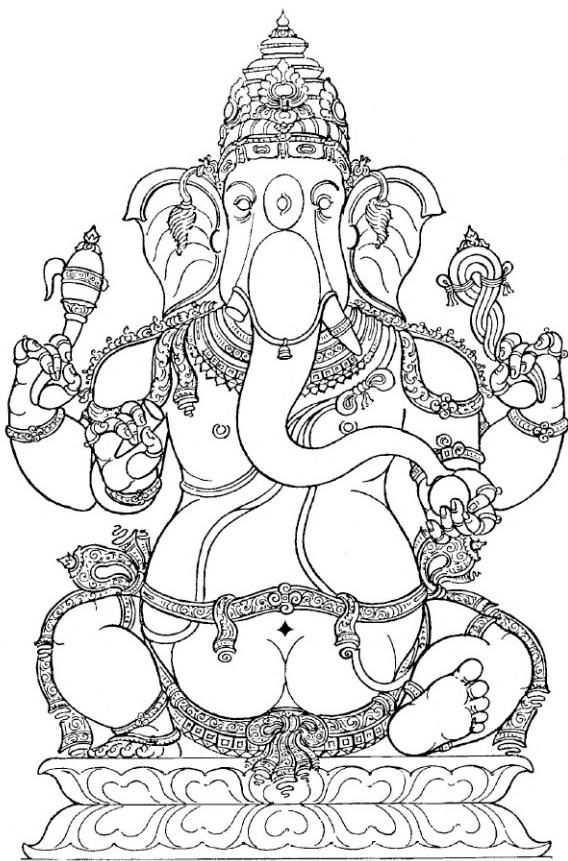
	<b>Padma</b> Lotus	By reproducing from its own matrix rather than the soil the lotus is a symbol of spontaneous generation ( <i>svayambhu</i> ). It grows in mud but rises in immaculate purity to the surface and opens to the sun - the evolution begins in the mire of <i>samsara</i> but rises to full enlightenment and purity. The closed lotus symbolizes potential and the open lotus — actualization.
	<b>Śaṅkha</b> Conch	In battle conveys the instruction of the commander to the troops. It represents the diffusion of the Dharma teachings and the proclamation of war upon the negative forces of the mind. Also creation through sound and the Pranava — AUM.
	<b>Cakra</b> Discus or wheel	The wheel is the symbol of the Dharma which rotates and spins its beneficial influence in all directions. It also symbolises the cycle of Samsara — of repeated birth and death which turns endlessly and from which we desire to be liberated. It is also used as a weapon and it's speed is faster than the speed of the mind — thus representing the cosmic mind which destroys our enemies in the form of the afflictive emotions.
	<b>Sarpa</b> Snakes	Kundalini - sexual energy latent within the lowest chakra – the muladhara at the base of the spine. Also symbolizes the control of anger the worst of all the negative emotions.
	<b>Śuka</b> Parrot	Truth, the transmission of the teachings. The parrot repeats exactly what it hears without clarification, modification or contortion.
	<b>Pātra</b> Bowl	In the hands of a Rishi or the Buddha it symbolizes the begging bowl and the idea of generosity. In the hands of the wrathful deities it is a skull bowl filled with blood which symbolizes the achievement of higher states of consciousness through the elimination of the lower mind and notion of self.
	<b>Paraśu</b> Axe	Non-attachment - the severing of our ties and bonds to the material world.

	<b>Ghanṭā</b> Bell	Impermanence. The phenomenal world which is impermanent and evanescent. Creation of the transient universe through sound — being perceived but not held and kept.
	<b>Cāmara</b> Fly-whisk	The obedience to the law and in particular to the highest principle of Dharma — <i>ahimsa</i> . Also represents the following of the teacher and the tradition.
	<b>Vajra</b> Thunderbolt	Diamond wisdom — the ultimate truth as adamantine and indestructable, but which destroys all that is other than truth. Symbol of sovereignty and the Cosmic Order.
	<b>Trīśūla</b> Trident	Control over action, speech and thought. Also fire — Agni and its 3 forms. The 3 paths to liberation Bhakti – love, Jñāna – wisdom and Karma– skilful action
	<b>Kunta</b> Spear	One-pointedness of concentration applied during meditation aimed at the goal of perfection. Focussed attention at eliminating the inner demons of delusion, anger, greed etc.
	<b>Khadga</b> Sword	Sword of wisdom which cuts through illusion and destroys all ignorance- hidden within all of us like a scabbard - needs to be withdrawn with skill and used with care and precision.
	<b>Pustaka</b> Book	The Vedas – sacred Scriptures and the formal learning of all sorts of knowledge and theory.
	<b>Japa-Mālā</b> Rosary	Sādhana or spiritual practice. Meditation and the recitation of mantras.

	<b>Cāpa/śara</b> Bow & Arrow	Concentration and focussing of the mind upon the goals of overcoming lower nature and achieving transformation, enlightenment and Liberation.  In the hands of Kama the god of love, it represents the attachment of the five senses to their objects.
	<b>Ādarśa</b> Mirror	Notion of the evanescence of the material delusion. The world is but a reflection in the mirror of the pure mind. So the mirror represents the perfectly clear mind in which all is reflected but not held or contained. The whole universe is a reflection of the Absolute Brahman.
	<b>Kalaśa</b> Vase	The receptacle of water which is the foremost representative of life in general, water is also allied to breath and all-pervading cosmic consciousness. The heart of the devotee should be ready like the jar to contain and hold the waters of truth and universal wellbeing. The jar also contains the nectar of immortality — liberation from conditioned existence.
	<b>Mrga</b> Deer	The deer symbolises gentleness as well as attentiveness — whatever its doing the deer is always mindful of predators. This is indicative of the way we should live in the world — practicing ahimsa and being mindful of the impermanence and transitory nature of all created phenomena.
	<b>Chatra</b> The Parasol	In Indian culture only high dignitaries were allowed the use of a parasol the largest ones usually white were reserved for the king and for the gods. The larger the number of smaller parasols heaped above the main one, the higher the personage represented. Thus in Indian culture the parasol is a symbol of spiritual power.
	<b>Durva</b> lawn grass	Associated with Gaṇeśa, it is the symbol of indestructibility and regeneration — offered in pūjās for the prolonging of life.
	<b>Nandi</b> The Bull	The libido, also Dharma — the way to enlightenment and liberation. Dharma has four feet — <i>satyam</i> = truth, <i>tapa</i> = austerity, <i>daya</i> = compassion, <i>dāna</i> = charity.

	<b>munda-mala</b>	Perpetual revolution of ages, the transient nature of all phenomenon (nāma and rūpa). It also represents all the false personalities we assume for creating identity. The myriad forms that egoism (ahaṅkāra) takes.
	Vibhuti	The sublimated power of procreation. Kāma or Eros was destroyed and turned into ashes by the ray from the third-eye of Shiva. Ashes also symbolise the ultimate transience of everything.
	<b>Chintā-mañi</b> Wish-fulfilling gem	Represents the mind, the precious jewel of the perfected mind in which all wishes and aims are accomplished.
	<b>Purna-kumbha</b> [The Full Vase]	symbolises fullness, and spiritual perfection which overflows to serve all beings.
	<b>Srivatsa</b> [endless knot]	Symbolises the way things are = endless and complex — without beginning and end.

# GANEŚA



presented before the mind before beginning any worshiped at the beginning of every enterprise. Not only this but his icon is seen at the entrance to almost every Hindu home and on every altar.

In iconography Ganesha is represented as an Elephant-headed man. The man part of Ganesha represents the manifest Principle which is subordinate to the unmanifest Principle which is represented by the elephant's head. The elephant head also represents certain qualities to which a sincere spiritual seeker is encouraged to aspire — strength, intelligence, endurance and gracefulness. The elephant is the only animal which has all its 5 organs in the head. Thus we are taught that exerting control over the five senses is an essential pre-requisite to achieving knowledge and wisdom.

## The Accoutrements

**The noose [pāśa]** — represents the three things which are the cause of our bondage to the material world which necessitate continued rebirth:

- Ignorance of our true nature [*avidya*] as eternal modes of consciousness and an erroneous identification with the material body and mind.,
- Our actions done in conformity with the false identification with the material vehicle and their inevitable reactions [*karma*].

Ganesha is one of the most popular and well-known of all the Hindu gods and is always worshipped first. He is the god of Wisdom and the patron of learning. Everything that we perceive in the universe must be grasped and expressed by the mind through the means of categories, therefore "category" is a fundamental principle of existence. The 'principle' by which all classifications, and the relationship of one thing to another in the universe can be understood is called *Gana-esha* — "The-Lord-of-Categories".

**Ganesha** — the Lord-of-categories has two wives *Siddhi* — Success, and *Buddhi* — Intelligence sometime his second wife is said to be *Riddhi* — Prosperity.

Ganesha represents one of the basic concepts of Hindu Philosophy — the identity between the macrocosm and the microcosm. In religious terms this is the identity between the individual and the universe (humankind made in the image of God). This idea of the potential divinity of the person and the immanence of God should be undertaken. This is the reason that Ganesha is

- The habitual pattern formations which we create [*vasana*]. Many of these are useful such as performing acts of daily living, and also special skills needed for our convenience such as driving, working computers and other forms of machinery and mechanical tasks needed for earning a living. But there are more subtle and invidious pattern formation which cause suffering to ourselves and to others. These need to be uprooted — de-conditioned — in order to progress towards enlightenment.

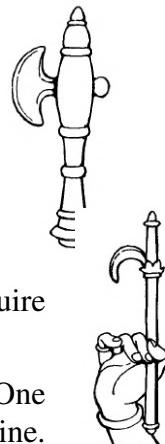
In the hands of a free and enlightened being these three become a mere ornament!

**The axe** [*paraśu*] — represents non-attachment. In order to progress on the spiritual path the essential virtue to cultivate is that of non-attachment to the sense-object and their means of gratification — the noose held in the one hand needs to be cut with the axe of non-attachment in the other.

**The Elephant Goad** [*ankuśa*] — represents perseverance on the path of spiritual practice. The spiritual path is very arduous and difficult but if we are committed then Ganesha when propitiated will prod us by means of the Goad, and guide us to our supreme destination — union with the Divine. But that incentivization will require pain and suffering!!

**The sweet** [*modaka*] — represents the basic needs for food, clothing and shelter. One should never neglect one's physical well-being while one is practicing spiritual discipline. The spiritual life is to be followed in harmony with a material life — not in opposition to it.

**The Mouse Vehicle** [*muṣika*] — The mouse is the master of the inner part of every building, and as such it represents the *Atman* or the Self. The Self lives in the innermost recesses of the intellect, within the heart of every being. The mouse is called *mushika* in Sanskrit. It is derived the word **mush** which means to steal. The Inner Ruler (*atman*) steals everything that we enjoy, hidden from our view it enjoys all the pleasures and remains unaffected by virtue or vice. The inner ruler is the real enjoyer of everything yet the ego in ignorance thinks that it is the enjoyer! The mouse also represents the uncontrolled and negative mind that lives in the dark hidden places and destroys for the sake of destroying. Ganesha, representing wisdom can control the mind by riding on it but the mind can never be completely crushed.



**One Tusk.** [eka-danta] Ganapati acted as the scribe for the Mahabharata, on the condition that he would on no account interrupt the recitation by Vyasa who was dictating the Mahabharata for the welfare of the world. When the pen broke Ganapati broke off his own tusk in order not to interrupt the work. Thus out of great compassion for beings the Lord was prepared to mutilate himself! This is the symbolism contained in the iconographical representation.

Ganapati is always depicted as being obese because all the universe is contained in his belly, yet he himself is not contained in anyone.

## THE ABSOLUTE — BRAHMAN

Hinduism teaches that there is ONE Supreme Reality— known as **Brahman** (The “Immensity”) which cannot be described by speech and is intellectually inconceivable — but it can only be realized in deep states of meditation. It is **that** from which every conceivable thing arises, by which things exist and into which everything is ultimately dissolved. This Supreme Being assumes a dual nature — Male and Female. The male aspect is known as *Purusha* which means “that-which-fills” — and the Female aspect is known as *Shakti* which translates as “Energy” or “Dynamic Force” or

*Prakriti* — material nature. The *Purusha* and *Shakti* are philosophically distinguishable but inseparable in their being and cosmic function. If the Purusha is the *word*, Shakti is the *meaning*; if the Purusha is the *flower*; Shakti is the *smell*. Both the subjective Purusha and objective Prakriti arise from the same "Oneness".

*In the beginning there was Being alone,  
One without a second. (Ch. U. 6;2:2)*

Although we talk of God in the masculine, any mention of 'him' automatically includes reference to 'her' as well. The Godhead is the basis, source and support of everything in the universe. Its nature consists of the three incommunicable attributes of (1) Absolute Being (*sat*), (2) Consciousness (*chit*), (3) Bliss (*ananda*).

## The Trinity — Trimūrti

The Supreme Brahman is both transcendent to the creation and immanent within it. It is at once the Creator, Sustainer and Destroyer of the cosmos. Although One and inconceivable, in order to interact with the physical universe which is projection of Itself, Brahman takes on a personal aspect known as **Isvara**. Isvara then further manifests in a threefold form. As **Brahma**, Isvara creates the universe with the aid of his Shakti **Sarasvati**. Brahma is the personification of the attribute of Being (*sat*) transformed in "becoming". As **Vishnu** he sustains the creation with the assistance of his Shakti **Lakshmi** — Vishnu is the personification of the attribute of Bliss (*ananda*) and as **Siva** he dissolves, transforms and recreates the universe with the help of **Kali** — Siva being the personification of the attribute of Consciousness (*cit*). These three are not separate *gods* but the supernal embodiments of the eternal cosmic dynamics of the centrifugal, centripetal and harmonising forces. This process can be likened to water vapour (Brahman) condensing into water (Isvara) and then solidifying into different shapes and forms as ice (the Trinity). Although different, all three substances are nothing but H<sub>2</sub>O.

## BRAHMĀ — Sat



Images of Brahmā are quite rare in India but more common in South East Asia. He is usually depicted in art in association with others and seldom on his own. Brahmā as the Creator God is always shown with four heads which represent the four volumes of the Sacred Scriptures — the Vedas by the power of which Brahmā effects the work of creation. In Hindu mythology Creation occurs by Brahmā projecting created beings from his own mind into the four directions.

Brahmā is the Space-Time or Revolving Principle of the Cosmos. The possibility of manifestation requires a "space" in which to appear or expand — a "space" which is the result of an equilibrium between the two forces of concentration (*Viṣṇu*) and dispersion (*Śiva*). Brahmā thus represents the possibility of existence resulting from a union of pairs of opposites. He is the "immense being" a personification of the great vastness — the first personal stage of existence.

In terms of consciousness and states of mind, Brahmā represents the waking state of externalised awareness (*jagrata*) — awareness and interaction with the world around us. Science deals almost exclusively with Brahmā.

## The Accoutrements

**The offering spoon** — held in his right upper hands symbolises the principle of sacrifice upon which the world is based. For something to be created or achieved something needs to be sacrificed whether it be resources, energy, time effort etc. All our "happiness projects" are like fires which need to be fed with the appropriate fuel. For example friendship is cultivated through offering gifts, invitations to bonding functions, supportive actions and edifying conversations, without these friendship dies out.

**The receptacle of water** — held in the left upper hand represents the all-pervading principle of life and consciousness. The heart of the devotee should be ready like the jar to contain and hold the life-giving waters of truth and universal wellbeing.

**The rosary** — held in the lower right hand indicates spiritual practice and meditation which are necessary for personal upliftment from the world of transmigration.

**The book** — held in the lower left hand symbolises intellectual pursuit of knowledge and the study of the Dharma.

Brahmā's vehicle is the Swan — a creature, according to Hindu mythology, which can separate milk from water. It thus represents the virtue of Discrimination — pure white symbolises purity and the ability to remain unaffected by the water in which it glides about — Detachment.



## VIṢNU — Ānanda

Viṣṇu is the name given to the cohesive or centripetal tendency of the universe — the Sattva Guna. The Viṣṇu force manifests as a flow towards the centre, towards greater cohesion, existence, reality, truth, light and sustenance. It is this centripetal tendency that holds the cosmos together and ensures its continued existence. It pervades all existence and is therefore known as "Viṣṇu". The name can be derived from the roots *vish* — *vishnati* — to spread, *vish* — *vishati* — to enter into or from *vishli* — *viveshti* — to surround = all these are expressions of pervasion.

In terms of consciousness Viṣṇu is identified with the dream-state (*svapna*) where things are conceived of as archetypes or prototypes prior to their manifestation. He is the abstract concept of all things whereas Brahmā is their realization in perishable materials.

Viṣṇu is the inner cause, the unseen power by which all things exist. Brahma is concerned with the outer material manifestation of all things, but Viṣṇu is their inner essence. Viṣṇu is the principle of duration and the power that holds the cosmos together. He is therefore the goal of all spiritual and religious paths. In fact all religion deals with Viṣṇu only. Every

religion is comprised of theology (Brahmā-vidyā) and a moral code (Dharma). Theology defines the principles which rule all existence the nature of the absolute reality and our individuality. Morals codes (Dharma)

prescribe the means for attaining the highest goal — both are encompassed by Viṣṇu.

Viṣṇu is the only high god who is regularly depicted in a reclining posture. He rests upon the great serpent of time (*ananta-sesha*) floating upon the Milk Ocean.

## Ananta Sesha.

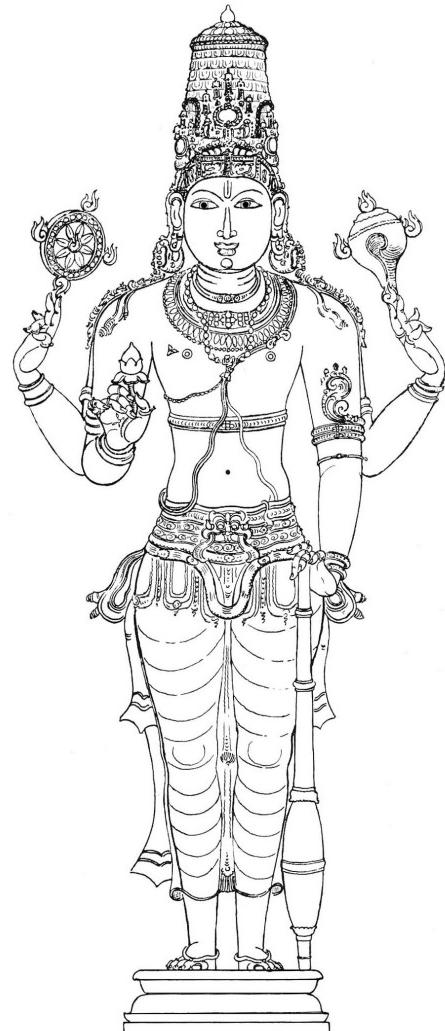
*Ananta śesa* is the name of the serpent with a thousand heads upon which Vishnu reclines. The serpent is non-different from Vishnu Himself. The word *ananta* means the endless or infinite, and *śesa* means the 'remnant' or 'residue'. When creation is withdrawn it cannot entirely cease to be,

there must remain a germ in subtle form of all that has been and will be so that the world can be re-projected when the time comes. It is this remainder of the universe that is embodied by *Ananta śesa* floating upon the limitless ocean of the causal waters and forming the couch upon which Vishnu rests.

## Ocean of Milk.

This symbolizes the state of undifferentiated unity of *prakṛiti* (primordial matter) prior to creation of the universe. It stands for the pure unadulterated state when the three cosmic forces; (*rajas*) centrifugal force — expansion, (*tamas*) centripetal force — contraction and (*sattva*) centralizing or harmonizing force] exist in perfect harmony and balance.

It also represents the consciousness, in the myth dealing with the churning of the ocean of milk we have the symbol of churning the mind through devotion in order to produce the essence (butter) in the form of God Consciousness. During this process the 14 jewels are extracted. The ocean is also symbolic of the space or ether or infinity, and Vishnu is identified with the sun whose function of creation, preservation and destruction in our solar system is identical to that of the Supreme Lord in the entire universe.



## The Accoutrements

### The Conch (Śaṅkha)

The conch in His upper left hand represents the first manifestation of articulate language—AUM—*nada brahman*. This monosyllable contains within itself all language and meaning in a

potential state. It is the seed from which speech developed — the nutshell containing the whole of wisdom. All the forms of the universe are effects of the primeval sonic vibration. Thus the conch is the symbol of the origin of existence. Its shape is a spiral, starting at one point and evolving into ever increasing spheres. It comes from water, the first compact element. When blown it produces the sound AUM.

During war in ancient India the conch was blown to signal the commencement of the battle, it was also blown by the victorious parties to announce their victory. The god's blowing of the conch therefore indicates that he is always ready to do battle with the forces of evil and for the protection of his devotees.

## The Discus (cakra)

The Discus in His upper right hand is called *sudarśana* which means 'pleasing-to-see', it is usually shown in iconography with a hexagon in the center. The six points of the two triangles represent the six seasons in a yearly time cycle, in the center nave is the seed sound (*bīja*) '*hrim*', which represents the changeless, motionless center, the Supreme Cause.

The Cosmic Mind has the unlimited power which creates and destroys all spheres of existence (*lokas*) and forms of the universe, the nature of which is to revolve. The Discus represents the "will-to-multiply". There is only one center to the wheel but it is said to have a thousand spokes.

## The Lotus (Padma)

The lotus in His lower right hand represents the manifested universe, the flower that unfolds in all its glory from the formless and infinite waters of causality. It also represents purity on mind, body and speech.

## The Mace (gada)

The mace held in his lower left hand is the form of strength or power, and the intellect is the highest power, by the power of mind one person can control thousands. The mace is thus the symbol of the intellect (*buddhi*) or the power of knowledge.

It is called *kaumodaki* which means *the-stupifier-of-the-mind*. The power of knowledge is the essence-of-life from which all physical and mental powers come. Nothing else can conquer time and itself become the power of time.

The mace as a symbol of sovereignty also indicates the law of Karma by which all humans are governed.

## Vishnu's Vehicle.



Vishnu rides upon a creature half-human & half-eagle known as Garuda or Garutman which means "*wings-of-speech*". He is the manifestation of the triple Vedas. As the embodiment of the principle of sacrifice Viṣṇu is carried by the rhythms, (Rik) sounds (Sama) and the methodology (Yajus) which are the instruments of the ritual. Garuḍa is depicted as the mortal enemy of snakes — he thus represents courage. Snakes represent all those factors that obstruct the spiritual path. His wife's name is *Unnati* or "progress" also called "queen-of-knowledge"

# ŚIVA — Cit

## Rudra-Śiva



**Rudra** means the “Howler” or the “one-who-causes-weeping” and **Śiva** means “the auspicious” or “benevolent one” — as the destroyer or transformer of the trinity Siva has a dual and indeed complex character. He is the power of destruction in the universe as well as the force of regeneration which follows destruction.

Śiva is the embodiment of *Tamas*, the centrifugal inertia, the tendency towards disintegration, dispersal, annihilation, non-existence, darkness, the Void. The dispersion is the final outcome of all differentiation, all time and space. In terms of consciousness Siva is experienced in the emptiness of dreamless sleep — the state of *sushupti*. Knowledge of outward forms is obtained in the state of awareness or wakefulness (*jagrata* = *brahma*). Knowledge of inner principles is achieved in the state of inner reflection and contemplation, in the dream world (*svapna* = *vishnu*). Perception of the formless transcendental Reality is achieved only in the state of deep silence, in the emptiness of the mind. (*sushupti* = *Siva*). The name *Siva* can also be

derived from the root *śin* which means “to sleep”. He is thus “the Lord of sleep”

Lord Siva is the teacher of the four great sciences which lead directly to an understanding of the higher reality of existence.

*Yoga* — the direct means to achieving supra-sensorial perception.

*Vedanta* — the theory of metaphysics or the philosophical pursuit of the Absolute.

*Language* — the relation of words to ideas and the expression of the Ultimate Reality

*Music*. — the perception of the relation of numbers to ideas and forms.

All of these can be derived from the mystery of the Maheshavara Sutras which arose from the drum of Lord Siva at the time of the cosmic dance and are the forces through which the universe was shaped.

From a purely material point of view destruction happens in 2 phases, the first is death and the second is dissolution of individuality. The first phase is the end of the body and physical existence the second is liberation from the subtle bonds which bind one to the cycle of reincarnation. These are represented by the 2 aspects of Siva — the first is “undesirable” and controlled by

**Rudra**, the second is “desirable” and is controlled by **Siva**. Thus lord Siva is ultimately the “death of death itself” — *Yamantaka*.

The deer and the crescent moon seen on the left side of the Lord’s crown both indicate the mind in its two aspects — intellect and emotion. **The moon** on Lord Siva’s crown indicates that as the Supreme Yogi he has

complete control over his mind, and as the World Teacher (*Jagat-guru*) he teaches that we too should try to control the intellect. **The leaping deer** in the hand indicates the teaching that we should also try to control the emotional mind which is as fleeting and unstable as the deer bounding through the forest at the slightest perceived disturbance. The deer is never still but constantly aware and attentive to every sound in the environment. According to Yoga Shastras (and confirmed by medical science) sound is the last sense to go when we fall unconscious

and is the first sense we regain when being aroused. Thus in the Yogic texts sound is indicative of all the other senses which follow it. The deer thus symbolises us in the material world where every sound and sense pleasure captivates our attention. We are unable to remain without sense stimulation for even a short while. In order to progress along the spiritual path it is essential for us to attempt to control and direct the emotional part of our being into constructive and universally beneficial work, while avoiding self-absorption and selfishness.

## The Accoutrements

**The axe** represents non-attachment. In order to attain abiding peace and joy it is essential to develop non-attachment to ego, ideas, emotions, family, friends, possessions etc. It is attachment and craving which are the twin causes of sorrow in the world — making a supreme effort, the seeker of supreme joy should sever these bonds. This does not mean renouncing the world, but renouncing attachment to things. Possessing them, enjoying them, caring for them but remaining emotionally unattached is the secret of true happiness.

**The rosary** (*japa mala*) is representative of spiritual practice. In this age of Kali the recommended spiritual practice for all people is simply the chanting of the holy name. For the devotees of Lord Siva this means the chanting of the sacred mantra of five letters **om nama śivāya**. This mantra is repeated constantly and if full concentration is not possible then a rosary is used as an aid to concentration. The teaching pose is indicative that Lord Siva is the world teacher and a devotee should not only worship him but also follow the teachings of the Scriptures.

**The Bull** — Nandi represents virility or libido. Nandi in Sanskrit means ‘delight’ and the greatest form of delight on the material

plane is sexual. Sex is perhaps one of the greatest drives and also the hardest to control and sublimate. The bull is usually quite placid but when aroused can become a terrible force capable of destruction. In the same way if the sex-drive remains uncontrolled it is capable of great damage to oneself and one’s relationships. Therefore the bull of our libido should be tamed, mounted and guided, it should not be left to wander at will, but directed at some universally beneficent goal. These are some of the lesson that we can learn from contemplating this particular Icon.



# NATARĀJA

The well-known bronze sculpture of *Natarāja* (the King of Dancer) is considered to be one of the most beautiful pieces of art produced by Indian craftsmen. The sanctum sanctorum of every Śiva temple is occupied by the *Lingam* a phallic image which symbolizes Śiva as the unmanifest Progenitor of the Universe, but every Śiva temple also has a shrine dedicated to Śiva in his form of *Natarāja* performing the *Ānanda tāṇḍava* — the "Dance of Bliss".

In this icon we are instructed in the five functions of the Supreme Being; creation, sustenance, transformation, revealing and concealing.

The Dance takes place within a ring of flames which symbolises the cycle of births and deaths, the cycle of universal creation and destruction — projection and withdrawal. The god dances upon the back of the "Dwarf of Ignorance" known as *Mulayaka*. It is ignorance of our true nature that binds us to cycle of continual becoming and it is wisdom/ enlightenment that releases us.

## The Accoutrements

**The hour-glass shaped drum (*damaru*)** — held in the right upper hand symbolises the act of creation. According to Tantric teachings the act of creation takes place through sonic vibration. This primary sound is symbolised by the drum, from which all the sounds of the Sanskrit alphabet originated at the beginning of time. The universe of our empirical experience is composed of Ideation (*nama*) and Form (*rupa*). We see the universe and then participate in it through the process of naming everything. By naming something we are able to understand it and obtain a sense of control over it. So this process of creating, cognising and naming are all symbolised by the drum. The two sides of the drum represent the pairs of opposites and their merging in the centre. God and evil, male and female, day and night etc are all merely two necessary ends of the same continuum.

**The flame** — held in the upper left hand of Śiva represents the flame of destruction and transformation. An object when consumed by the fire is destroyed in one sense but transformed into energy and thus continues in another more subtle form.



In the same way our physical bodies and the universe are destroyed but the Self (*atman*) continues to exist in a subtle form as does the universe. Nothing is destroyed absolutely — it only undergoes changes and change is the only thing constant in our world.

**The Gesture of Fearlessness (*abhaya mudra*)**. The left hand is held up in this gesture of dispelling fear. Our greatest fear is that of death and personal annihilation. The upheld hand is Śiva's assurance of protection and preservation. It also indicates the necessity of cultivating harmlessness (*ahimsa*) and affording the gift of fearlessness to all other beings that we encounter.

**The Gesture of concealment** by the right lower hand indicates drawing of the veil of Cosmic Illusion (*maya*) over all creation. There is a very subtle veil that clouds our understanding — even though we see death all around us we each think that we are

immortal. We know what is good for us but still we pursue that which is transient and unbeneficial. We cling to the ephemeral universe thinking that we can gain ultimate pleasure and satisfaction through it, but even though we fail we still go on trying — this is *Maya* or Cosmic Illusion.

And finally the left leg projecting outside of the circle of influence indicates the way of release and liberation. By surrendering to the Divine Will and making an offering of ourselves we can, through the Grace of Śiva obtain release from the cycle of births and deaths and attain eternal beatitude (*Nirvana*).

The Crest-moon in his hairs indicates the power of sublimated eros, it is also the symbol of time - days and months.

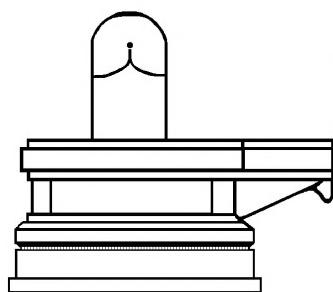
The River Ganges caught in his out spread dread-locks symbolise the intention, the ability and the means of liberating all sentient beings.

The tiger skin loincloth — The tiger is the vehicle of Śiva's consort Durga who represents primordial nature (prakriti) - Śiva is thus shown to be the master of Nature in all its forms.



## THE LINGAM

“The lord-of-sleep” (Śiva), is primarily worshiped through the abstract symbol of the **lingam** — the phallus which is depicted standing in a base which encircles and holds it — the **yoni** or the womb. The lingam ejaculates the seed (*bija*) of the spatial universe into the yoni which is the matrix of all manifestation. Creation of all life-forms occurs through copulation, the mingling of the female and male seed. The most appropriate iconic images for this process of generation are the organs of generation — the *Lingam* and the *Yoni*.



There is nothing to be ashamed of in this imagery — it is purely a biological fact of life. Many modern Hindus, under the irreverent attacks of puritan Christians and Muslims have started pretending that the lingam is NOT a phallic emblem but rather an “abstract” form of the formless

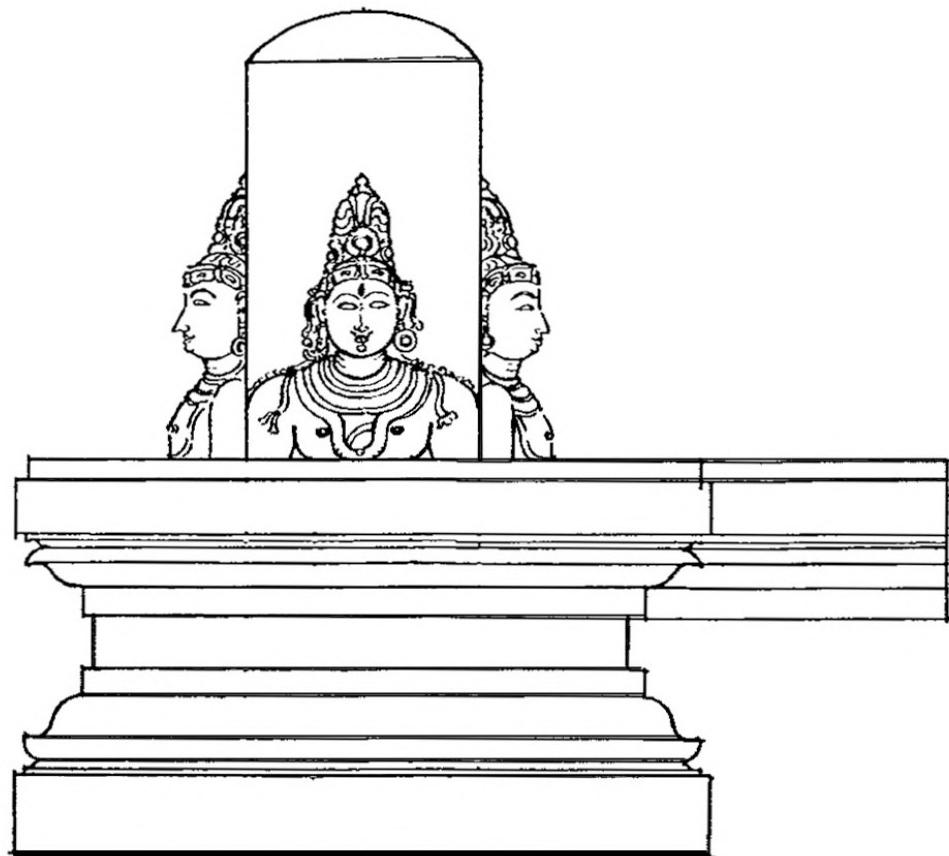
Most of these “puritanical” reformers base their argument upon the Sanskrit grammar in which the term “Lingam” means sign, signifier or indication. *Linga* is therefore that which differentiates

one thing from another — i.e. gender. How is a male to be differentiated from a female except by the genitals? i.e. penis and vagina.

The *Lingam* as a symbol of creation is universal and common to most ancient cultures throughout the world.

Lord Śiva is the “Transformer” for matter/energy is never destroyed, it only changes its form. Śiva is therefore both the author of disintegration and reintegration. Birth requires death, all changes entail the destruction of the previous form or state and the generation of a new one.

Lord Śiva is also known as Mahākāla — the Great Principle of Time in which all changes occur.



## The Consorts of the Trinity

According to the principles of Sāṅkhya cosmology the Divine Feminine (*Prakrti*) is comprised of the three "qualities" or "tendencies" (*guna*) of nature. The 3 Goddesses are the personifications of the dynamic power of manifestation in its three aspects of existence — Reality (**sat** = *Brahma*), Consciousness (**cit** = *Shiva*) and Experience (**ananda** = *Vishnu*).

Creation arises from this triple form of Energy — *Śakti*.

"According to the plan formed in the divine mind, Energy (*Śakti*) arose from the radiance of *Reality-Consciousness-Experience*. From Energy sprang forth the principal vibration, the point-limit from which the manifest world begins." (Quoted in Karapatri's Sri Bhagavati tattva," Siddhanta, V, 1944-45. [4851])

Kriya-śakti	Jñāna-śakti	Iccha-śakti
As Reality — <i>Sat</i> — she manifests as the power-of-coordination ( <i>sandhini</i> ), that is, the power of the centripetal tendency visible in the Sun. She is the Left-handed-One ( <i>Vāma</i> ), who is the power-of-action ( <i>kriya</i> ), that is, of causation. She is the power of multiplicity, Lakshmi (the goddess of hundreds of thousands), the consort of Vishnu.	As Consciousness — <i>Cit</i> — she is the power-of-understanding ( <i>saṁvit</i> ), the power of the revolving tendency, visible in the Moon and often pictured as "the Elder" ( <i>Jyestha</i> ). She is the power of volition, the power of the flow of knowledge, Sarasvati, goddess of learning and consort of Brahma.	As Experience or Joy — <i>Ananda</i> — she is the power-of-delight ( <i>ahlādini-sakti</i> ), of enjoyment, the power of the centrifugal, disintegrating tendency, visible in Fire, the destroyer. She is pictured as the Fierce ( <i>Raudri</i> ). She is the power of cognition, of realization, of transcendent knowledge, the destroyer of the world of illusion, the consort of Siva. She is also called Beyond-Reach ( <i>Durga</i> ).

"The manifest forms of Existence-Consciousness-Experience, which are action [*kriya-Śakti*], knowledge [*jñāna Śakti*], and desire [*iccha-Śakti*], are the beginning of creation. They are the Cosmic Law (*dharma*) that governs divinity, a law which is non-different from divinity itself. It is the nature of the Immensity. The Scripture describes this nature of divinity as 'spontaneous knowledge, strength, and action.' (*svabhaviki-jnana-balakriya*). The law that rules the nature of divinity is identical with the Divine Energy. Because of its uncontrollable intensity, it is spoken of as the Wrathful (*Chandi*). This Energy takes the form of the Transcendent-power-of-Time (*Maha-Kali*), of the Transcendent-power-of-Multiplicity (*Maha-Laksmi*), of the Transcendent-power-of-Knowledge (*Maha-Sarasvati*), according to the task to be performed. To see in this Supreme Wrath a male or a female merely depends on the inclination of the worshipper. In male terms she is known as the transcendent lord of tears, Maha-Rudra, in female terms as Wrath (*Candi*) or Beyond-Reach (*Durgā*)."  
 (Karapatri, Sri Bhagavati tattva)

## SARASVATI — The Flowing-One



The Śakti of Brahma, represented as both his daughter and his consort, is the goddess of speech, the Flowing-One (*Saras-vati*). She represents the union of power and intelligence from which organized creation arises.

Speech is the power through which knowledge expresses itself in action. *Sarasvati* is the source of "Sonic-creation". Creation or rather "Projection" of the universe occurs in two parallel processes — creation through sound (*nāma*) and the projection of forms (*rūpa*). She is the goddess of eloquence, of all forms of knowledge, the patroness of the arts and of music. She is the source of all communication through language and writing. She is the power that resides within all poetry and writing.

The name *Sarasvati* is that of a sacred river, mentioned in the Rig Veda as:— "She who goes pure from the mountains as far as the sea." This river dried up about 2000 years ago and the

course can now be seen from space. According to the Mahabharata, the river was dried up by the curse of the sage Utathya. *Saras*, which means fluid, refers to anything that flows and as such applies to speech and thought as well as water. Other names of *Sarasvati* are Eloquence (*Bhārati*), Transcendent Knowledge (*Mahā-vidya*), Speech (*Vāc*), Transcendent-Word (*Mahā-vāñi*). She is the Noble-One (*Ārya*), the Power-of-the-Immense-Being (*Brahmi*), the Wish-Cow (*Kāma-dhenu*), the Womb-of-the-Seed or Womb-of-the-Elements-of-Speech (*Bija-garbha*), Divinity-of-Wealth (*Dhanesvari*), etc.

### Accoutrements



#### Pustaka

Book

The sacred Scriptures and all forms of book learning and theoretical knowledge. In the modern context it would include computers and all other forms of visual and sound media as well.



#### Japa-mālā

Rosary

Spiritual practice. Meditation and the recitation of mantras.



#### Vīnā

Lute

Music, singing, dancing. Inner sound of spiritual harmony; the vibration of the atoms in motion, creation, the sound of the spheres, the harmony of all the diffuse elements of the cosmos.

## LAKṢMĪ — She-of-the-Hundred-Thousands

The Śakti of the all-pervading Preserver, Vishnu, is represented as the power of multiplicity or goddess of fortune, "She-of-the-Hundred-Thousands" (*Laksmi*). When she is associated with the universal principle of beauty she is known as Śrī.

Both "*Lakshmi*" and "*Śrī*" are mentioned in the Vedas in the context of "fortune." But Lakshmi as the Goddess of Fortune is depicted as a major goddess only in the epics. The Taittiriya Samhita declares that *Śrī* — Fortune and *Hri* — Beauty are the two wives of the solar-principle (Aditya). The Satapatha Brahmana describes *Hri* — Beauty as born from the lord-of-progeny (Prajapati). Beauty is also the mother of Lust (*Kama*). When the ocean was churned by the gods and the anti-gods, Lakshmi arose from the waves, a lotus in her hand. The Vishnu Purana says that *Śrī* — Fortune was first born as a daughter of the Crack-of-the-Ritual-Fire (*Bhrgu*) united to the Hymns-of-Praise (*Khyati*). Fortune is thus the fruit of the ritual-sacrifice (*yajña*).

As the consort of the Highest God Lord Vishnu, Lakshmi is also the embodiment of compassion (*anugraha-śakti*) and tempers His quality of Justice (*nigraha-śakti*). As the Goddess of compassion she further transforms and sanctifies resources into their use for the benefit of others.

Some of her other names are:— the Powerful-One (*Indira*), the Ocean-born (*jaladhi-ja*), the Fickle-One (*Cancala* or *Lola*), the Mother-of-the-World (*Loka-mātā*).

Lakshmi also has a sister — Misfortune (*A-laksmi*), fearful and ugly, also known as the Elder-Sister (*Jyeṣṭhā*).



### Accoutrements



#### Padma — Lotus

By reproducing from its own matrix rather than the soil the lotus is a symbol of spontaneous generation (*svayambhu*). It grows in mud but rises in immaculate purity to the surface and opens to the sun - the evolution begins in the mire of *samsara* but rises to full enlightenment and purity. The lotus is the quintessential symbol of purity and enlightenment. The closed lotus is a symbol of potential and the open the symbol of actualization.



She is usually depicted seated upon a lotus - representing the enlightened and pure mind. Her two lower hands are held in the gesture of fearlessness (*abhaya*) granting freedom for fear and suffering to all beings, and the gesture of generosity (*varada*).

## Mahā-Lakshmi as Vīrā.



A rarer form of Lakshmi is known as *Vira-Lakshmi* or "Heroic-Lakshmi" — in which she displays all the qualities necessary for an pro-active social and spiritual involvement. Envisaged in a cosmic form as the Transcendent-Fortune (Maha-Lakshmi) — the power of progress, accumulation and advancement she embodies the characters of all the gods together.

She is seated on the "Lion-Throne" of universal dominance, in her upper hands she holds the symbols of Vishnu her consort — the conch and the discuss — symbols of creation and transformation respectively. The next two hands down hold the bow and moon-shaped arrow symbolic of the mind and its application single-mindedly to the objective being contemplated. The two hands below these hold the trident and the razor. Symbolising control of mind, speech and action through the trident and the dangerous nature of the spiritual path — "the razor's edge". The lowest 2

hands are held in the gestures of fearlessness and generosity.

## PĀRVATĪ, ŚAKTI, KALI

### The Powers of Procreation, Development, & Destruction.

Like Śiva, his Śakti is also extremely complex. the Śakti of Śiva is depicted under three main aspects:— a creative, active aspect called simply "Energy" (*Śakti*), an abiding, peaceful, spatial aspect named *Pārvatī*, the "Daughter-of-the-Mountain" (i.e., Ether personified), and a destructive time aspect known as the "Power-of-Time" (*Kālī*).



Pārvatī is a gentle benevolent goddess, daughter of the axial mountain — the Himalaya, from which the earth energy radiates into space. The mountain (*parvata*) or the Snow-capped-One (*Himavat*) is a symbol of ether — *Akāśa*. The peaks of the mountains are regarded as the places from which the earth energy flows into the ether. No dwellings are built on top of mountains and hills and only places of worship may be built there. The mother of Parvati is *Menaka*, who represents intellect (*buddhi*). Born of Ether and Intellect, Pārvatī is the omnipresent conscious substance of the universe. Pārvatī is also the matron of all the elemental spirits — the *bhutas* and *ganas* (categories) that wander about the earth.

The Divine nature in Tantra is often conceived of as a playful young boy or girl, aged sixteen, full of vitality, energy and procreative desire, a playful being for whom the whole world is a toy, a the whole of life a game. The Divine Playfulness is personified either as Krishna or as a manifestation of Pārvatī known as Lalitā. She holds the Pāśā, Aṅkuśa and a sugar-cane bow with which she shoots the five arrows of the sense-objects.



Sometimes the Goddess is shown alone in which case she is depicted as Maheśvari — the feminine counterpart of Lord Maheśvara.



The agency of Śiva's procreation is the Goddess known as *Power-of-Lust* (Rati) — the wife of Kāma-deva. Without sexual desire no conception takes place. She appears to be the very opposite of the power of destruction — Kālī, the *Power-of-Time*. When Śakti, which is also the *power-to-think* (*vimarśa*), unites with the *lord-of-sleep*, a state of agitation, or unrest (*unmana*) arises, from which projection of the universe springs forth. When Śakti separates herself and remains aloof from him, a state of perfect quiescence or harmonization occurs (*samana*), in which the world dissolves. The Goddess *Rati* is the libido — the ubiquitous force of lust, of enjoyment, but strangely enough also the power of liberation — for liberation from the bonds of material nature is not a passive or a neutral state but indeed an

very pro-active struggle.

## DURGĀ

One of the most popular forms of the Goddess who is worshipped alone and has many temples and shrines dedicated to her is Durgā. Durgā's feminine power contains the combined energies of all the gods. Each of her weapons was given to her by the various gods: Rudra's trident, Vishnu's discus, Indra's thunderbolt, Brahma's Kamandalu, etc. etc.

According to a narrative in the Devi Mahatmya, Durgā appeared as a warrior goddess to fight an asura (an anti-god) named Mahiṣasura or 'buffalo-demon'. He had unleashed a reign of terror on earth, heaven and the



nether worlds, and he could not be defeated by any man or god, according to a boon given him by Brahmā. The gods went to entreat the aid of Lord Viṣṇu. Hearing of Mahisāsura's atrocities, Vishnu, Shiva and all of the gods became very angry and beams of fierce light emerged from their bodies. The blinding sea of light met at the Ashram of a sage named Katyayan and Durgā emerged from this coalesced pool of light. The goddess Durga took the name Katyaayani from the priest and emerged from the sea of light. She introduced herself in the language of the Rig-Veda, saying she was the form of the supreme Brahman who had created all the gods. Now she had come to fight the demon to save the gods. They did not create her; it was her divine Līlā she emerged from their combined energy — she represents the totality of our higher potential for Self-realization.

Mahiśāsura or the buffalo-demon represents the gross negative aspect of Tamas which obstructs and thwarts spiritual progress. As the personification of the Tamasic ahaṅkāra — he constantly and adroitly changes shape whenever he is confronted by Durgā. We have the incredible capacity for self-delusion and whenever we are confronted we always manage to worm our way out and somehow or other justify our actions both to ourselves and to others. But finally, once we have exhausted all our excuses and self-delusions we are finally vanquished by our higher nature and experience the bliss of Ātma-bodha — self-realization.

## The Names of the Goddess



As the gentle companion of Siva's pleasure games the Goddess is mainly known as the Daughter-of-the-Mountain (*Pārvati*) or the Mountain-born (*Adri-ja* or *Giri-ja*), the Daughter-of-the-Snow-capped-One (*Haimavati*). She is also the Earth-born (*Ku-ja*), the Fair-One (*Gauri*), the World's-Most-Fair (*Jagad-Gauri*), the Peace-of-the-Night (*Umā*). Auspicious (*Śivā*), she is the Mother (*Ambikā*), the Mother-of-the-World (*Jagan-mātā*), the Giver-of-Existence (*Bhavāni*). She is the Youngest (*Avara*), the Virgin (*Kanyā*), the Virgin-Girl (*Kanya-kumāri*). She is the Sustainer-of-the-World (*jagad-dhātri*), the Auspicious-Power-of-Time (*Bhadra-Kāli*), the Giver-of-Food-and-Plenty (*Annapūrṇā*), the Shining-One (*Devi*), the Consort-of-the-Great-Lord (*Mahā-devi*). As the embodiment of lust she is Wanton-eyed (*Kamaksi*), Her-very-Name-is-Lust (*Kāmākhya*). She is the Rubbing-or Squeezing-One (*Mrda, Mrdani*), Noble (*Arya*), Rich (*Rddhi*), Pearl-eared (*Karna-moti*), Recognizable-from-her-Lotus (*Padma-lancana*); she is Always-Auspicious (*Sarva-mangala*). Like-a-Bee (*Bhramari*), she is Siva's- Messenger (*Siva-duti*).

She is the Goddess Beyond-Reach (*Durga*), the Endless (*Ananta*), the Everlasting (*Nitya*). Fearful, she is Tawny-Dark (*Pingala*), Spotted (*Karburi*), Naked (*Kotari*), Violent (*Candi*), Dark (*Syama*), Terrible (*Bhairavi*). She is the Fearful-Goddess (*Bhima-devi*), the Power-of-the-Antigods (*Mahasuri*), the Fierce (*Rajasi*), Red-toothed (*Rakta-danti*); she is the Mother-of-the-God-of-War (*Skanda-mata*), the Victorious (*Vijaya*).

The Candi Mahatmya, one of the hymns of praise dedicated to her, depicts her as Ten-armed (*Dasa-bhuja*), Riding-on-a-Lion (*Simha-vahani* or *Simharathi*). She is the "Destroyer of the Buffalo-Demon" (*Mahisha-mardini*), the Disheveled (*Mukta-kesini*).

Being addicted to austerities, she is the Leafless (*Aparna*), the Widow (*Kātyāyani*), Grass-robed (*Śākambhari*).

From Siva she obtains names which are the feminine form of his, such as the Tawny-One (*Babhravi*), the All-Powerful (*Bhagavati*), the Ruler (*Isani*), Divinity (*Isvari*), Dwelling-in-the-Kalinjar-Mountain (*Kalanjari*), Adorned-with-Skulls (*Kapalini*). She is the Sentiment-of-Love (*Kaushiki*), the Savage-Girl (*Kirati*), the Great-Goddess (*Mahesvari*), the Goddess-of-Tears (*Rudrani*), Universal (*Sarvani*), Auspicious (*Siva*), Three-eyed (*Tryambaki*).



Mahākāli

## SUBRAHMANYA

(Murugan, Skanda, Saravanabhava, Kārttikeya, Kumāra)



As the second son of Lord Śiva he's the embodiment of skilful action, just as Ganeśa is the personification of wisdom. Skilful action (*kuśala karma*) is that which is direct at *Ātma-bodha* — self-realization. The several and collective human perfections are all personified in Subrahmanya. When all the five senses and the mind as the co-ordinating factor are sublimated and directed towards enlightenment then one attains super-consciousness.

Lord Subrahmanya was born from the Tejas or intense energy of Lord Śiva in order to relieve the gods of the oppression of Tārakāsura who had gained a boon of invincibility from Brahmā.

Tāraka-asura means the “demon-of-salvation” and he represents those factors which hinder real progress in both material and spiritual terms. The demon personifies our selfish delusions of what we *think* is in our own self-interest but is actually not. A person with a migraine headache for example may think it in their best interest to have a hole drilled in their head to relieve the pressure — a

misadventure which would surely result in death!! So we as individuals and as a society are addicted to the pursuit of short-term self-interest goals which in the long term are detrimental to us. We see this in the environmental and economic policies of short-sighted administrators.

Skilful Means and real Universal Wellbeing requires that this demon of short-term self-interest be dispatched — requiring immense effort!!

The 6 heads represent a number of concepts associated with spiritual growth and progress.

1. the organs of knowledge (*jñānendriyas*) i.e. touch, taste, hearing, smell, sight, and the mind as the 6<sup>th</sup>.
2. the six seats of consciousness in the subtle body — known as the cakras. Mūlādhāra, svadhiṣṭhāna, maṇipūra, anāhata, viśuddha and ājña. The path of sādhana is a journey through these states of ever expanding consciousness.

3. They represent the 5 states of matter (earth, water, fire, air and ether) and the jīva.
4. The 6 qualities of the Supreme Being — omniscience, non-attachment, omnipotence, sovereignty, grace and glory.

He was born as 6 separate beings and was the coalesced into a single entity with six heads and twelve arms. This is also indicative of the 5 kośas or sheaths and the jīvātman. The food sheath, the vital sheath, the mind, the intellect, and bliss sheath and the individual Self. The 12 arms are symbolic of the skill and talent to perform multiple tasks and to progress skilfully materially. Both spiritual and material progress are inseparable from a well harmonised and integrated vision of the world and our place in it.

Subrahmaṇya has many forms each one depicting a different aspect of his complex personality. As Skanda or Kumāra he is the embodiment of chastity (*brahmacārya*) and conservation of the vital essence (*retas*)

considered as essential for spiritual practice. In this form he appears as a young lad, a religious student clad only in a loin-cloth (*kaupinam*) and carry his spear.

As Sañmukha or Subrahmaṇya he is married to two wives:—

**Valli** (the earth) was the daughter of a humble farmer, unsophisticated and uneducated. She represents the casual or informal means of progress and growth. Through intuition and common-sense one can sometimes become more wise than an highly educated professor.

The other wife was **Devasena** (army of the gods) or **Devakunjari** (divine celestial elephant) — these names are suggestive of ability and power of action. The Devas rose to their high position through sheer endeavour. Indra became king of the gods through the skilful performance of 100 yajñas. The eminence of the celestials is due to skilful means alone.



## Accoutrements

Among his many weapons the most important is the Spear. The spear (*kunta* or *vēl* in Tamil) represents the focussed mind directed at the goal to be obtained or the enemy to be slain in the form of self-referent desire (*kāma*), anger (*krodha*), delusion (*moha*), arrogance or feeling of superiority (*mada*), niggardliness (*lobha*), and malicious envy (*mātsarya*).



A weapon which is unique to Subrahmanyā is the **tanka** or chisel used by sculptors and stone-masons — śilpis. It represents the work that needs to be done on ourselves in order to manifest our true essence nature. The figure is already present in the stone, but it takes the skill of the sculptor to liberate it. In the same way the Jīvātman is present within the body/mind casing, it takes the skill of a sādhaka to reveal it.

Subrahmanyā's vehicle is the **Mayūra** — peacock which represents pride, arrogance and notions of superiority which need to be controlled in order to cultivate skilful means.

Another creature associated with Subrahmanyā is the insignia of cock which appears on his standard. The cock always symbolizes the immanent dawn of realization. The tame snake too is his companion, indicating the taming of anger and maliciousness.

## AYYAPAN or DHARMA SĀSTA



Ayyapan is the son of Lord Viṣṇu and Śiva. The energy of compassion (*dayā*) of Viṣṇu and wisdom (*jñāna*) of Śiva coalesced into the divine refulgence *tejas* personified as Ayyapan. He is the embodiment of **Tapas** or austerity — deep meditation which generates the internal heat of both compassion and wisdom. His worship is confined almost entirely to the state of Kerala in South India. His iconography is simple — he sits in a yogic posture displaying the *varada* and *abhaya* mudras.

Sometimes he is shown riding on a tiger carrying a bow and arrows — symbolizing the harnessing of our courage and sagacity and directing it at the achievement of spiritual development.

## HANUMĀN

Hanumān is one of the heroes of the Rāmā�ana and he's the embodiment of wisdom (*jñāna*) and devotion to God (*bhakti*) as well as courage and fortitude (*bala*). He is the quintessential spiritual **vīra** or hero/warrior who is humble and submissive but also capable of immense acts of valour in the cause of Dharma. He's totally dedicated to the Lord and to the preservation of the Dharma.

He is usually depicted as a humanoid monkey in the posture of submission standing in front of the temple or shrine of Lord Rāma. When enshrined alone he is usually shown holding up the mountain or brandishing his favourite weapon the club or *Gadā*. The club represents Cosmic Order (*Rta*) as well as Karma.



## KĀMA DEVA

Kāma Deva or the God of Desire is most primal drive in the universe and therefore a force which must be reckoned with. In some places he is worshipped at the time of marriage. In the Atharva Veda (9:2:19) Kāma is mentioned as the supreme divinity, the impeller of creation. Kāma Deva is the principle god among the group known as the Viśvedevas or Universal Principles who are invoked in ceremonies pertaining to the ancestors. The other Viśvedevas being:



1. *Vasu* — Dwelling Place
2. *Satya* — Truth
3. *Kratu* — Will, Intelligence, Sacrifice
4. *Dakṣa* — Ritual Skill
5. *Kāla* — Time
6. *Kāma* — Lust or Desire
7. *Dhṛti* — Forbearance
8. *Kuru* — Action, Ancestor of the Kauravas
9. *Purū-ravas* — Cry of Abundance
10. *Mādrava* — Cry of Joy
11. *Rocaka* — Pleasantness, Beauty
12. *Dhvani* — Flame
13. *Dhuri* — Leadership

Kāma is said to be Self-born but in some texts like the Harivamśa he is said to be the son of Lakṣmī. Kāma is the personification of Desire in general, but the most specific and powerful of all desire-forces is the libido or sex-drive.

Kāma has 2 wives:— 1. **Rati** — the pleasure obtained from intercourse and 2. **Prīti** — love and affection for another.

He also has a younger brother named **Krodha** — Anger, a daughter named **Trṣā** — thirst or craving, and a son named **Aniruddha** — the Unobstructed. His best friend and eternal companion is **Vasanta** — spring, and he is always accompanied by the demons called the **Māras** — strikers or killers. He is served by the Gandharvas and the Apsaras.

### The Accoutrements

Kāma Deva is the presiding deity of the mind, the god of beauty and youth. He is usually pictured as a handsome proud adolescent riding a parrot. He carries a bow made of sugarcane with a string comprised of bees. He holds five arrows.

**Śuka** — the parrot symbolizes Truth for whatever is taught to the parrot is repeated verbatim. The parrot does interpret or process what it hears and learns but only repeats it exactly.

**Ikṣu-kodanḍā** — the sugarcane bow. Sugarcane is sweet at the oldest part signifying that true love comes with age. The leaves of the sugarcane are sharp and capable of cutting one, the powder from the leaves is also a severe irritant, indicating that desire is always accompanied by hurt. This idea is further strengthened by the bees forming the string of the bow. Bees produce honey but they also sting. Honey cannot be gotten without some risk of pain!

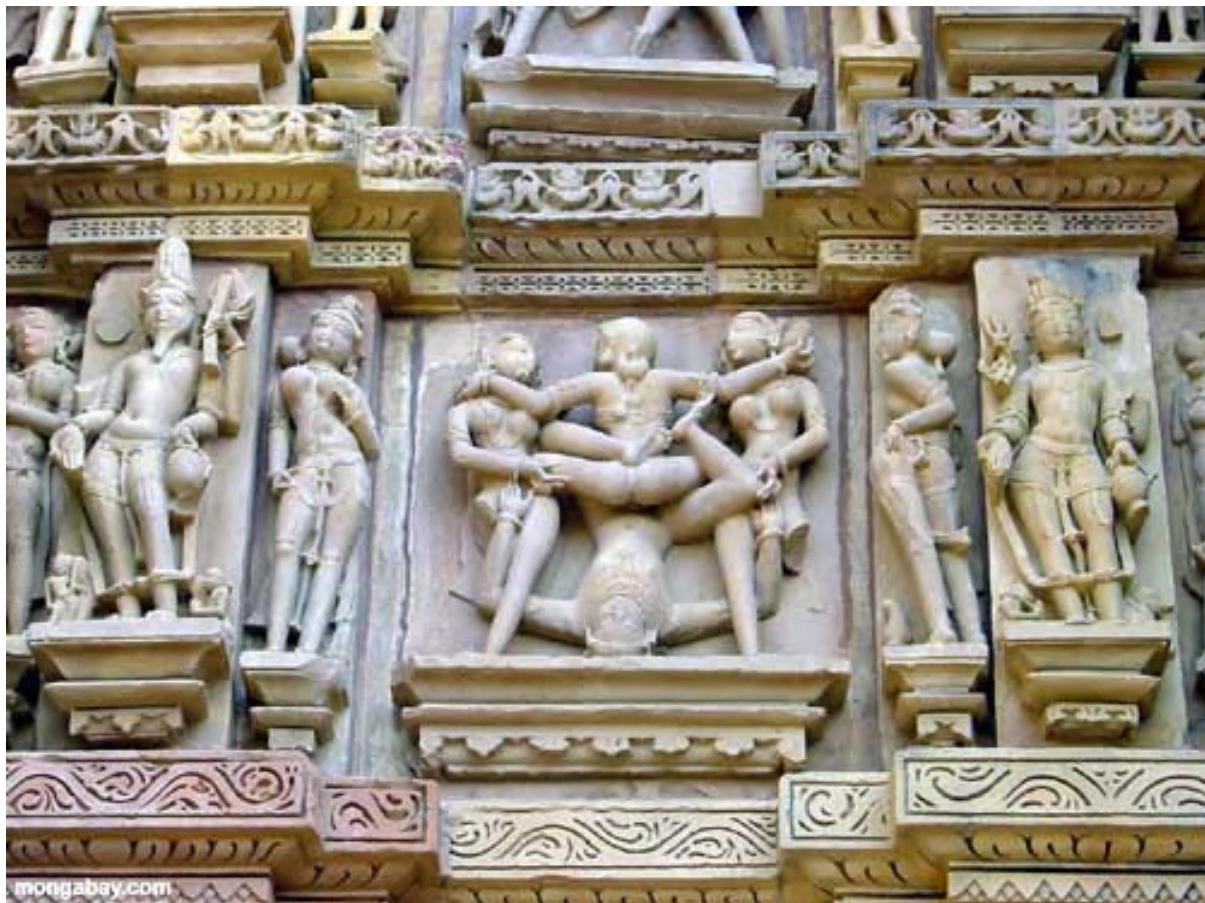
**Pañca-bāṇa** — the five arrows symbolize the five flowers associated with romance as well as the five senses which are all affected by the active libido. Desire is fulfilled through all the senses — sight, hearing, taste, touch and smell.

**Vasanta** — Kāma deva is most active when accompanied by his mate Spring, all the biological universe is aroused and active in reproduction.

**Māras** — wherever Kāma goes the Striker follow. All desire is accompanied by suffering in some form — either suffering from the intensity of the love or deprivation of it or its loss. It is well attested that Love so very easily turns into Hate, which is another aspect of the same Love force.

Some of Kāmadeva's names are:—

- Madan* — "He who intoxicates with love."
- Manmatha* — "He who agitates the mind."
- Māra* — "He who injures."
- Pradyumna* — "He who conquers all."
- Anaṅga* — "He who is without a body."



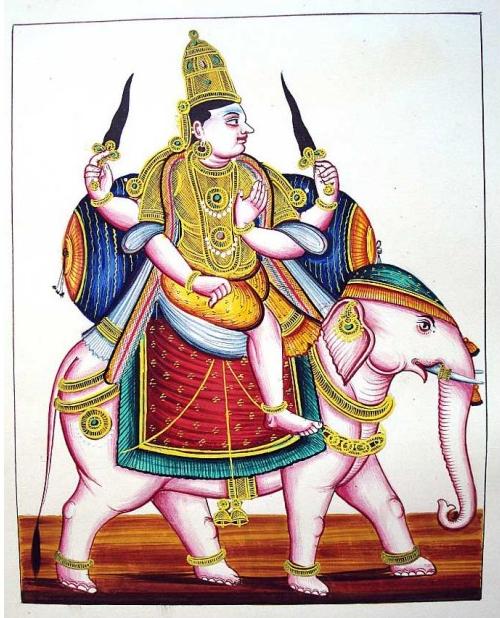
Sculptures on the façade of the Khajuraho temple

## ICONOGRAPHY OF THE VEDIC DEITIES.

Almost all the original High Gods of the Rig Veda have been demoted in modern Hinduism to Loka-pālas — guardian deities of the directions. Three relatively minor deities of the Rig Veda were elevated to the modern Trinity — Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva. The Loka-pālas play a major role in Vāstu and are invoked in all ceremonies involving buildings. In All major yajñas they are also invoked and offerings made to them.

### THE LOKA-PALAS Guardian Deities of Space

#### **Indra — Regent of the East**



Indra is the king of the gods and was one of the major deities of the Rig Veda. A quarter of the hymns of the Rig Veda are dedicated to him and he is the national god of the Vedic people. His most lauded activity was the destroying of the demon Vrtra who had imprisoned the cows in the mountainous cave. Using his famed *vajra* — diamond thunderbolt. Vrtra means the obscurer or the “one who conceals.” The cows represents the streams of light or consciousness.

Indra represents the all pervading electric energy (*vidyut sakti*), he is the ruler of the storm but also the cause of fertility.

The devas represent various aspects of our psychology and Indra is the king of all the senses and as such represents the mind. Indra assumes manifold forms and shape-shifts as he will. He has all the exuberance of youth and is addicted to pleasure and intoxicants. He has numerous love-affairs and sends Apsaras to disturb the meditation of sages

Indra lives in the city of **Amarāvati** (immortality) with his wife is **Śaci** — (Divine Grace) and by her has 3 sons: **Jayanta** (victory) **rśabha** (excellence) and **Mīḍhuṣa** (liberality).

Indra has two vehicles – an elephant with four tusks names **Airāvata** (born-of-the-ocean) and a horse named **Ucchaiśravas** (loud-neighing).

#### **Accoutrements**

**Vajra** (thunderbolt) — represents diamond like wisdom which destroys ignorance in the form of the demon-who-conceals.

**Ankuśa** (elephant goad), **Pāśā** (noose), **Dhanuṣ** (bow), **Khadga** (sword)

## Agni — Regent of the South-east

Agni was the most important god of the Rig Veda, the mediator between humans and gods and the protector of men and their homes. Esoterically he represents divine illumination. The science of fire is the key to all knowledge. The discovery of fire led to the creation of laws, rules and discipline — civilization stems from the correct use of fire.

In the Viṣṇu Purāṇa Agni is the firstborn son of Brahmā. In the human world Agni's father was **Dharma** (eternal-law) and his mother **Vasubhārya** (Daughter-of-light). His sister is **Medhā** (intelligence).

He was married to **Svāhā** (invocation-at-offering) and by her has 3 sons **Pāvaka** (Purifier), **Pāvamāna** (purifying) and **Śuci** (Purity). His second wife is said to be **Svadhā** — the invocation of the ancestors.

He is shown having 3 faces — representing the 3 Vedic fires Āhavanīya, Dakṣiṇa and Gārhapatiya agnis.



### Accoutrements

His standard is smoke (**Dhūma-ketu**) and he rides on a ram (**Chāga**) one of the main sacrificial animals which also represents leadership and aggression.

He carries a:—

Javelin (**Tomara**) — same symbolism as a spear — mental focus on the goal

Lotus (**Abja**) — enlightenment and purity

Axe (**Paraśu**) — severing the bonds of attachment

Torch (**ulkā**) — kindling of the fire or enthusiasm for the dharma and enlightenment

Fan (**vyañjana**) — fanning the spark of knowledge

Oblation spoon (**sruk**) — converting all action into service of the divine.

### The Ten Forms of Agni

THERE ARE ten main forms of fire, five natural forms and five ritual forms.

The five natural forms are:—

1. **Agni** is the earthly or common fire, either visible or potential, that is, hidden in fuel.
2. **Indra** (or Vayu), the power of the lightening which dwells in the clouds, is the fire of space, of the intermediary world. It is the source of conflagrations and of the dreaded bush-fires (dāva-agni').
3. **Sūrya** (the Sun), the fire of the heavenly sphere which illumines the world, is known as the celestial-fire (divya-agni).
4. **Vaiśvānara** (the all-pervader) is the power of digesting, found in all things, all beings. It is the support of life.

**5. Vādava Agni** The fire of destruction, Agni's most fearful form remains hidden under the sea, ever ready to destroy the world.

The five forms of ritual fire are:—

**6. Brahmā-agni** — The fire-of-the- Immensity is said to appear spontaneously during the ritual of sacrifice at the sound of the magic formula (the Arani-manthana Mantra that is uttered while the fire stick is revolving. This is the fire born of the world.

**7. Prajāpatya-agni** — The fire-of-the-lord-of-progeny is handed over to the unmarried student when he is invested with his sacred thread. In this fire he is to perform the daily ritual offering known as Agnihotra. He is pledged to preserve this fire, worship it, and feed it with offerings, till the day when, at the approach of old age, he abandons his home to retire into the forest.

**8. Gārhapatya-agni** — The house-holder's fire is brought into the house after the marriage ceremony and is the center of family rituals. It is to be kept ever alive and all the offerings of the married man should be offered into it.

**9. Dakṣina-agni** — The Ancestors' fire or 'Southern fire' in which offerings are made to Ancestors. The rituals of exorcism (abhicāra yajñā) are to be performed in this fire. During the great ritual sacrifices a fire lighted from a 'Southern fire' has to be maintained outside the southern gate of the sacrificial-pavilion (yajña- maṇḍapa). This fire is expected to burn away the obstacles which would otherwise arise to prevent the completion of the ritual.

**10. Kravyāda-agni** — The funeral-fire which is lit on the funeral pyre and into which the body is offered as the final oblation.

Elsewhere the ritual fire is shown under six forms:— the fire of the householder, **gārhapatya-agni**, the fire of Vedic rituals, **āhavaniya-agni**, the fire of the Ancestors, **dakṣina-agni**, the fire of the assembly, **sabhya-agni**, the fire of the Sacrifice (Agnihotra), **āvasathyā-agni**, the fire of divine service, **aupāsana-agni**.

## Yama — Regent of the South



Yama (the Binder) is the god of death, the sovereign of the infernal regions. The wrathful one who judges the dead whom his messengers drag before his throne. He is the embodiment of righteousness (Dharma) and the king-of-justice (dharma-rāja). He is, however, compassionate.

In the Vedas, Yama is the First Ancestor and the king-of-Ancestors (pitṛ-rāja). He rules over the kingdom of the dead where the Ancestors dwell. He is also the king-of-ghosts (preta-rāja).

The word *yama* means "binder, restrainer." It is Yama who keeps humankind in check. "He binds, he decides what are the actions of the living beings that bear or do not bear fruit"

Yama is punishment (*danda*), the Eternal Law on which the universe rests. He is Death (*Mṛtyu*) and the End (*Antaka*), Time (*Kāla*), the Finisher (*Kṛtānta*), the Settler (*Śamana*). As the ruler of the southern direction, Yama is called lord of the south (*Daksina-pati*).

Yama is the son of the resplendent Sun god —Vivasvat (Rig Veda 10.14.5), the embodiment of social morality represented as one of the aspects of the Sun and envisaged as the progenitor of humankind. Yama's brother is the Lawgiver, Manu, who shares with him the title of progenitor of humankind. Yama's twin sister is Yamī, who loves him passionately, though he is sometimes said to have resisted physical union with her (ibid. R.V.10.10). After his death she mourned him so bitterly that the gods created Night (*Yāminī*) to make her forget. Yamī later appeared on the earth as the river Yamunā.

Yama married ten of the daughters of Ritual-Skill (*Dakṣa*), who are the powers born of the ritual sacrifice. Some texts state that his two beloved consorts are shroud-of-smoke (Dhūmorṇā) that rises from the funeral pyre and Victory (*Vijayā*.) Yama is sometimes shown with another 2 wives, —Golden-Garland (Hema-mālā), Good-Behavior (Suśīla).

Yama's city is the City-of-Bondage (*Samyamini*). Manifold-Secret (*Citra-gupta*) is his scribe. His ministers are Wrath (*Cānda*) and Terror (*Mahācānda*). Yama's charioteer is Sickness (*Roga*). He is surrounded with demons who are personifications of the different diseases. But there are also many sages and kings who assemble in his court to pay him homage. Musicians and heavenly dancers charm his visitors. At the door of the judgment hall is a guard called Legality (*Vaidhyata*).

Yama owns two four-eyed dogs with wide nostrils, who were born to the Fleet-One (*Sārama*), the bitch who guards the herds of Indra. They watch the path of the dead.

## Accoutrements

Yama is of dark green complexion with glowing red eyes. He dresses in blood red garments. His hair is tied on the top of his head and he wears a glittering crown. In many stories he's described as a handsome man. The virtuous and the sinners see Yama in different forms. To the virtuous he appears beautiful and compassionate like Viṣṇu. To the sinner he appears wrathful and terrifying.

He holds a pāśa (noose) and a danda (staff), and also carries an paraśu (ax), a khadga (sword), and a dagger. He rides a black buffalo and sometimes appears himself in the form of a buffalo. The buffalo being the symbol of *Tamas* — darkness, inertia, ignorance.

## Manifold-Secret (*Citra-gupta*), the Scribe of the Lord of Death

Brahmā having completed his work, meditated upon the Supreme Immensity. Suddenly, while he sat in meditation, a man of divine appearance sprang forth from his body. This man held in his hand an account book and a pen. He came to be known as Manifold-Secret (*Citra-gupta*). Dwelling near the king-of-justice (Yama), he was instructed to write down an account of the good and bad deeds of all living beings.

He is the patron deity of all scribes, accountants and others involved in secretarial work.



## Nirṛta — Regent of the South-West

The regent of the southwestern direction is Misery (*Nirṛta*). Misery is the son of Vision (*Kaśyapa*) and Fragrance (*Surabhi*). He is also one of the eleven Rudras (Padma Purāna, Srṣṭi khāṇḍa, ch. 40). He is the lord of elves (*nairṛta*), ghosts (*bhūta*), and night-wanderers (*rāksasa*) and also the lord-of-the-directions (*Dikpāla*). People worship him to gain victory over their enemies. In Vāstu his direction is the place of the rubbish heap or re-cycling bins as he presides over decay and rot.

A legend says that once there was a virtuous king of the criminal tribe of the Śabara named Yellow-Eye (*Pīngākṣa*). One day in the forest he heard people crying for help. He ran and found travelers being looted by a group of savages (*dasyu*). He fought them and was killed — being killed in the defence of strangers is equal to a Vedic Yajña and as a reward he attained godhood and was made the regent of a direction.

The nairṛtas are the descendants of Nirṛti and are represented as a kind of elf associated with Kubera.

## NIRRTI

Nirṛti, the Goddess of Misery is a sinister goddess representing suffering, poverty, disease, and death. As the Embodiment of all sins, she appeared at the time of the churning of the ocean before the goddess of fortune, Lakṣmi. Hence she is the older sister of Lakṣmi known as Alakṣmī. Her abode is the sacred fig tree, the pippala, where, every Saturday, Lakṣmi comes to visit her.



To her realm belong gambling, prostitution, sleep, poverty, disease, and all the forms of trouble.

She is the wife of Sin (Adharma), the son of Varuṇa. Her sons are Death (*Mṛtyu*), Fear (*Bhaya*), and Terror (*Mahābhaya*). In this world all those who are born with a handicap, in the families of thieves or evildoers, and yet are virtuous and kind are especially protected by Nirṛti.

## Varuṇa — Regent of the West



Varuṇa (the Coverer or Binder), the personification of the Mysterious Law of the Gods presides over the relationship of humans with the gods. He is the ruler of the "other side," of the invisible world. He represents the inner reality of things, higher truth (*rta*), and order in their transcendent aspects, beyond understanding. His absolute power is felt during the night and in all that is mysterious, while man-made laws, represented by Mitra, rule the day. Although usually linked with Mitra, Varuna is occasionally invoked alone. He is everywhere, in the universe and around it, pervading all things as the inner law and order of creation. He established and maintains natural and moral laws, expressions of the cosmic order. His laws are unassailable and rest upon him as on a mountain. As the King, Varuṇa is the Justice-giver, whose duty is to punish the guilty. He catches the evildoers and binds them with his noose.

In the later mythology Varuṇa came to be relegated to the position of a god of death. Indra, the ruler of the sphere of space, took precedence over him, the ruler of the sky. In the Mahābhārata (2.9) and all later texts Varuna appears as the lord of the waters, the ruler of the sea or the

subterranean waters. He is the giver of rain and has been the owner of the soma. He is the regent of the western direction. His domain is the Western Ocean. He is rich and happy. He also rules over one of the lunar mansions (naksatra).

The name Varuṇa may be derived from the root *vr*, meaning "to surround, envelop, cover." It refers to all that veils or covers, all that is mysterious, cryptic, hidden. Varuṇa is also the lord of the causal waters that surround the world. It can also be derived from the root *vr*, "to restrain," "to check," referring to the god's character as the enforcer.

His city, the most beautiful in the world, is called Starry-Night (Vibhāvarī), or Earthly-City (Vasudhā-nagara), or Joyful (Sukha). He has two wives the junior being Prosperity (Rddhi), and the elder wife Vāruni, is the goddess of liquor. She is sometimes called or Gauri, the Fair One. His sons are:— Nourisher (*Puṣkara*), Strength (*Bala*) and a daughter Liquor (*Surā*). Another son, Wrong-Deed (*A-dharma*), married Misfortune (*Nirṛti*). Her sons are are:— Ill-omens (*nairṛta*) and demons (*rākṣasa*), Fear (*bhaya*), Terror (*Mahā-bhaya*), and Death (*Mrtyu*).

### Accoutrements

Varuṇa appears as handsome and well-dressed. He rides upon the **Makara** — a mythical sea-monster sometimes associated either with a shark or a crocodile. His right hand shows the **abhaya-mudra** — gesture of removing fear. In his left hand he holds a **nāga-pāśa** — noose made of a serpent.

## Vāyu — Regent of the North-West

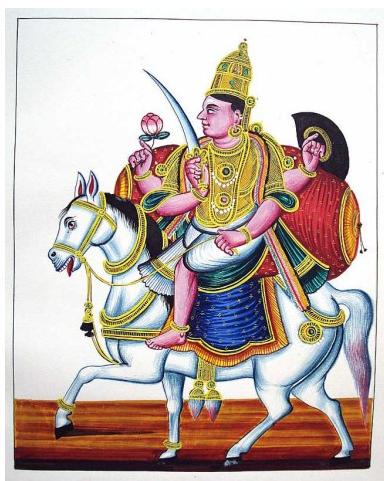
Vāyu is the Lord-of-Wind. In the Upanisads, Vāyu appears as the cosmic life breath, the universal "spirit," the impeller of life and of the living. Vayu is also the substance and the essence of speech (vāc). A few Vedic hymns are addressed to him. The name Vāyu comes root *vā*, "to blow."

Vāyu is the purifier, the first to have drunk the ambrosia, the soma. He is an explorer, the messenger of the gods, the leader of sacrifices. He is also called the "wanderer" (*Vāta*), he without whom one dies" (*Marut*), "the one by whom one lives" (*anila*) and the "cleanser" (*Pāvana*). Vāyu has a destructive aspect (*ugra*) as well as a gentle, beneficial form (*sānta*). Vāyu is the friend of Agni whom he strengthens and helps.



### Accoutrements

In the Vedas Vāyu is pictured as a strong and powerful white man riding a deer. He carries a bow and arrows and flags. All his attributes are all white. He is also the father of Hanumān.



## Kubera — The Regent of the North

THE REGENT of the northern direction is Kubera the god of wealth, the chief of the genii, called the mysterious- ones (*yakṣa*) or the secret-

ones (*guhyaka*), who guard the precious stones and metals stored inside the earth.

Kubera's half brothers were Roarer (*Rāvana*), the powerful king of Srilanka, Jar's-Ear (*Kumbhakarna*), and Terrific (*Vibhisana*), who became Rama's ally. Their sister is Sharp-Nails (*Śūrpa-nakha*). Ravana drove Kubera away from his capital in Lanka and took over.

Kubera's wife is Auspicious (*Bhadra*) and his sons are Reed-Axle (*Nalakubera*), who is also called "son of Mayu rāja" (the king of animals resembling men)," and Bejeweled-neck (*Mani-grīva*), who is also called Colorful-Poet (*Varṇa-kavi*). His daughter is Fish-eyed (*Minākṣī*).

Kubera is shown as a white dwarf with a large belly. He has three legs which represent the three principle desires — *putreṣa* (desire for offspring) *vitteṣa* (desire for wealth and power) and *lokaisa* (desire for fame and recognition).

The name of Kubera seems to be of unknown origin, though it has been, suggested that it may be derived from *ku-bera*, the "ill-shaped one," a word similar to *kim-purusa*, *ku-purusa*, etc.

An offering is made to him at the end of all ritual sacrifices, though he does not appear to have a separate cult. He is now worshiped mainly in Nepal, but is one of the seven divinities of wealth known all over Asia. Kubera is the giver of jewels, the protector of travelers. He is associated with Gaṇeśa, the lord of categories. Whatever treasures are in the earth, they all belong to Kubera. Only through his kindness do men obtain precious metals and stones from the entrails of the earth.

## The Yaksas, Guardians of the Earth's Treasures

THE *yaksas*, with their king, Kubera, were originally anti-gods (*asura*), but made friendly overtures to the gods and were accepted in their midst.

The term *yaksa* comes from a Vedic word meaning "marvelous" or "mysterious." The mysterious-ones (*yaksa*) are also the secret-ones (*guhyaka*). They are often mentioned with the night-wanderers (*rākṣasa*), or demons. The *Yakṣas* are also connected with the serpents (*nāga*). With Kubera at their head they seceded from the *rākṣasas*.



## Īśāna — Regent of the North-east

The north eastern direction according to Vāstu is the most important of all directs being ruled by Lord Śiva in the form of Īśāna — "The Ruler".

He is the embodiment of all learning and the master of all knowledge. Īśāna is connected with the element air, the sense of touch. The *prāṇa* enters into the house from the Īśāna kona and exits via Nirṛti kona. In the Īśāna kona one installs the household deity or at least keeps some sacred object.

Some texts state that he should carry a Lute (*vīnā*) and a skull (*kapāla*)



## THE NAVAGRAHAS — Planetary Deities

The Nine planets (*grahas*) are the “Lords of Karma” and are the mediators of Karma – Action — it’s causes and it’s effects. Everything in the world is ruled by one or other of the Grahas. The external Macrocosm is known as *Brahmāṇḍa* and the internal Microcosm of the individual is known as *Piṇḍāṇḍa* — both are mutually related to each other. For example the Sun in the solar system is homologous with the Self (*jīva*) in the individual. The Moon is homologous with the emotions in the individual etc. etc.



### SŪRYA NĀRĀYAÑA

Sūrya Nārāyaṇa is the personification of the Sun which is daily worshipped by all Hindus. The Sun is the direct manifestation of the Absolute or Brahman. The physical Sun shares some characteristics posited of Brahman — the Absolute Reality.

We speak of the Sun rising, setting being hidden by the clouds etc. In fact he neither rises nor sets nor is covered by anything. All of these perceptions of the Sun are conditioned by our time and space bound existence upon earth.

Self-luminosity is that which reveals itself and throws light on other objects. The earth and the moon both come from the Sun but neither is self-luminous, it is the Sun that reveals both

the earth and the moon — all of this is akin to what we conceive of in *Brahman*.

The Sun is both the material cause and the efficient cause of his satellites, he originates them and sustains them but himself does not undergo any change. Brahman projects the universe into being, sustains it but is never Itself modified.

The Sun rides a chariot drawn by 7 horses which are the 7 colours of the spectrum. He carries the **Sankha** and **Cakra** — conch and wheel, the symbols of creation through sound and order. He’s often depicted displaying the **varada** and **abhaya** mudras as well. Sometimes he is shown just holding two lotuses as symbols of unfoldment.

Sūrya has four wives:—

1. *Suvarcala* — the Resplendent, illumination or knowledge
2. *Chāyā* — Shade
3. *Jyoti* — Light
4. *Aiśvarya* — Sovereignty

His charioteer is Aruṇa the red-light of dawn and his companion is Uṣā — the dawn itself.

## The Moon (Chandra or Soma)



Chandra is said to be the son of Prabhākra (the Sun). He is also identified with the Vedic SOMA. Soma = Amṛta the nectar of immortality which alludes to the nourishing, nurturing and invigorating influence of the Moon on all life forms. He was married to the 27 daughters of Daksha Prajapati which represent the 27 lunar mansions known as nakṣatras — his favourite wife being Rohini. He seduced the wife of Brihaspati named Tārā and had by her a son — Budha.

He is described as young, beautiful, fair; two-armed and having in his hands a club and a displaying the varada mudra, or holding 2 white lotuses. He rides in a chariot pulled by ten white horses or sometimes just an antelope. The 10 horses represent the 10 indriyas (organs of action of organs of knowledge) and the 3 wheels of the chariot represent the 3 Gunas.

## Mars (Kuja or Mangala)



Once when Lord Śiva was immersed in deep meditation (*samādhi*) at his abode, Mount Kailāśa, three drops of perspiration originated from his forehead and fell down on the earth. From those drops manifested a very beautiful infant, who was of reddish complexion and who had four arms.

Lord Śiva handed the child over to the earth goddess, Bhūmi for upbringing and he was thus named **Bhauma** as he was nurtured and brought up by 'Bhumi' (earth).

When Bhauma grew up, he went to Kāśī and did a tremendous penance to please lord Śiva who blessed him by granting him the status of a Graha and appointed him to rule 'Mangala loka' (the Abode of Auspiciousness), which was superior even to the 'Śukra loka' (the Abode of the god of Venus — Śukra).

His weapons are the mace (gadā), trident (śūla) and śakti and he displays the *abhaya mudra*. His vehicle is the Ram representing leadership and being head-strong. Mangala is considered a malefic of the first order. He rules over the signs Mesha (Aries) and Vrishchika (Scorpio), is exalted in Makara (Capricorn) and has his fall in Karka (Cancer). Mangala represents drive and physical

energy, aspiration, self-confidence and ego, strength, anger, impulsiveness, heroism and adventurous nature. As the God of War he is associated with battle, war and soldiers.

## Mercury (Budha)

The adulterous son of the Moon by Tārā wife of Jupiter. He married Ila who was the daughter of Manu. Manu was childless and arranged for a yajña to be performed for obtaining a son, but the priest got the mantras wrong and a daughter was born. Mitra and Varuna performed a sex-change and Ila became a boy who was named Sudyumna. Under a curse of Śiva, Sudyumna again became a woman and married Budha. Later on she was again transformed by Vishnu into a male and had 3 sons. Another version of the story has Ilā (Īda) as the eldest son of Manu who trespassed upon a grove sacred to Lord Shiva and under a curse was transformed into a woman. Due to his friends supplications Śiva and Pārvati agreed for him to be male one month and female the next.

Mercury rules the intellect and communication skills. He rides upon a lion and holds a mace (*gadā*), sword (*khadga*) and a shield (*khetaka*) and shows the *varada-mudra*. or *abhaya-mudra*.



## Jupiter (Guru or Brihaspati)



*Bṛhaspati* — "lord of prayer or devotion", also known as *Deva-guru* (guru of the gods), is considered the personification of piety and religion, and the chief 'offerer of prayers and sacrifices to the gods' (purohita), with whom he intercedes on behalf of humankind.

He is the arch-nemesis of Śukrācarya the guru of the Dānavas (anti-gods). He is also the god of wisdom and eloquence, to whom various works are ascribed, such as the Barhaspatya sutras.

Bṛhaspati is the son of Rishi Angiras and has three wives. His first wife Śubha gave birth to Bhānumati, Rāka, Arcīsmati, Mahāmati, Mahiśmati, Sīnivali, and Haviśmati, his seven daughters. His second wife Tāra gives birth to seven sons and a daughter.

Through his third wife Mamata, he has two sons, Kacha and Bharadvaja. He attained his position as the preceptor of the Devas, by performing penances. Lord Shiva granted him this position, as well as his position as one of the Navagrahas (Nine Planets).

Bṛhaspati is considered to be the greatest benefic of any of the planets.

This indicates vastness, growth and expansion in a person's horoscope and life. Br̥haspati also represents the balance of past karma, religion, philosophy, knowledge and issues relating to offspring. He is concerned with education, teaching and the dispensation of knowledge.

He displays the *varada-mudra* and carries the water-pot (*kamaṇḍalu*) rosary (*akṣamālā*) and a stick (*danda*).

## Venus (Sukra)



Sukra “clear, pure” or “brightness, clearness”, is the son of Bṛigu, and Guru of the Daityas and Asuras. He is of white complexion, middle-aged and of agreeable countenance. He is described variously as mounted on a camel, horse or crocodile. He holds a stick, japa-mālā and a lotus and sometimes a bow and arrow

He studied the Vedas under the rishi Angirasa but he was disturbed by Angirasa's favouritism for his own son Brihaspati. He then left and went to study under rishi Gautama. He later performed penance to Lord Shiva and obtained the Sanjivani mantra (a mantra that revived the dead). He married Priyavrata's daughter *Urjasvati* and they had four sons — Caṇḍa (fierce), Amarka (deathless), Tvaṣṭṛ (designer) Dharātra (support) and a daughter from his marriage to Indra's daughter Jayanti by the name Devayani (path of the gods

Due to the hatred Śukrācārya bore towards *Vishnu* for what he perceived as the murder of his mother as she had given shelter to some asura whom Vishnu was hunting, Śukrācārya decided to become the Guru of Asuras. He helped them achieve victory over the Devas and used his knowledge to revive the dead and wounded among them.

In one story, Lord Vishnu is born as the Brahmin dwarf-sage Vāmana. Vāmana comes to take the three worlds as alms from the asura king Bali. Lord Vishnu wanted to deceive the king Bali who was the grandson of the great king Prahlada, in order to help the Devas. The sage Śukrācārya identifies him immediately and warns the King. The King is however a man of his word and offers the gift to Vamana. Śukrācārya, annoyed with the pride of the king, shrinks himself with his powers and sits in the spout of the Kamaṇḍalu from which water has to be poured to seal the promise to the deity in disguise. Lord Vishnu, in disguise of the dwarf, understands immediately, and picks a straw from the ground and directs it up the spout, poking out the left eye of Śukrācārya. Since this day on, the guru of the asuras has been known to be half blind.

Devayani was the daughter of Śukrācārya, who was rejected by the son of Brihaspati, Kacha. She later marries the legendary Somavanshi king Yayati. In the time of the Mahabharata, Śukrācārya is mentioned as one of the mentors of Bhishma, having taught him political science in his youth

## Saturn (Śani or Śanaiścara)

Śani is also known as Śanaiścara comes from *Śanayē Kramati Sah*, the one who moves slowly, because Saturn takes about 30 years to revolve around the Sun.

Śani is the son of Surya and his wife Chāyā (Shade). He is the elder brother of Yama, the god of death, who is also the Lord of Dharma or justice. Surya's two sons Śani and Yama judge and punish all beings for their bad karmas. Śani supervises the results of our deeds in this life through appropriate joy and sorrow; Yama grants the results of our deeds after death.

It is said that when Śani opened his eyes as a baby for the very first time, the sun went into an eclipse, which clearly denotes the impact of Śani on astrological charts. He is known as the greatest teacher and well-wisher for the righteous as well the greatest punisher for those who follow the path of evil, betrayal, backstabbing and unjust revenge.

He is depicted dark in colour, clothed in black; holding a sword, arrows and two daggers and mounted on his vehicle the carion crow which consumes the rice-balls offered to the dead.



## Rahu (North node of the Moon)



During the Great Churning of the Ocean — *Samudra manthana*, the asura Rahu drank some of the *amṛta* (divine nectar). Sun and moon realized it and alerted *Mohinī* (the female avatāra of Vishnu). Before the nectar could pass his throat, *Mohinī* cut off his head. The head, however, remained immortal due to the effect of amrita and became Rahu. It is believed that this immortal head from time to time swallows the sun, causing eclipses. Then, the sun passes through the opening at the neck, ending the eclipse. The body also turned into Ketu due to a boon, and it in turn swallows the moon on timely basis to cause a lunar eclipse.

Rahu is a legendary master of deception who signifies cheaters, pleasure seekers, operators in

foreign lands, drug dealers, poison dealers, insincere & immoral acts, etc. It is the signifier of an irreligious person, an outcast, harsh speech, falsehoods, uncleanliness, abdominal ulcers, bones, and transmigration. Rahu is instrumental in strengthening one's power and converting even an enemy into a friend.

In Vedic astrology Rahu is seen as an asura or demon who does his best to plunge any area of life he controls into chaos, mystery, and cruelty. He is associated with the world of material manifestation and worldly desire, as well as random, uncontrolled growth without wisdom or understanding.

Rahu is supposed to be a mighty and naughty child of *Maya*, and thus has a lot of dualities attached to its *mayavi* (illusory) nature. It relates to the Seventh Ray energy of esoteric astrology, as it represents a force displaying all the possibilities within the realm of existence.

There is no equal to Rahu when it comes to giving upliftment in name and fame or sudden luck at gambling. The area in which this success is attained usually relates to the significations of the house Rahu is placed in. All the electric lights that illuminate our world in the nighttime can be said to be associated with Rahu. Rahu is known as the “artificial sun,” which is fitting considering the introduction of electric lights, adding to the illusion and glamour of modern times. Rahu has in a way created its own artificial sun for his favoured time, the night.

Rahu rides upon a lion and holds a sword (*khadga*), shield (*khetaka*) a trident (*sūla*) and displays the *varada-mudra*.

## Ketu (South node of the Moon)



**Ketu** is the descending lunar node. Vipracitti begot one hundred and one sons, through his In his wife Simhikā, of whom the eldest is Rāhu and the others are the one hundred Ketus.

Ketu can have a tremendous impact on human lives and in some special circumstances it helps one achieve the zenith of fame. Ketu is often depicted with a gem or star on his head signifying a mystery light.

Ketu represents karmic collections both good and bad, spirituality and supernatural influences. Ketu is associated with the Meena Avatar (Fish Incarnation) of Vishnu. Ketu signifies the spiritual process of the refinement of materialization to spirit and is considered both malefic and benefic, as it causes sorrow and loss, and yet at the same time turns the individual to God.

In other words, it causes material loss in order to force a more spiritual outlook in the person. Ketu is a *karaka* or indicator of intelligence, wisdom, non-attachment, fantasy, penetrating insight, derangement, and psychic abilities. Ketu is believed to bring prosperity to the devotee's family, removes the effects of snakebite and illness arising out of poisons. He grants good health, wealth and cattle to his devotees. He rides on a vulture and carries the club (*danda*) while displaying the *abhaya-mudra*.

# DAŚA MAHĀ-VIDYĀS

## The Ten Great Wisdom Goddesses

### KĀLĪ

Of all the Hindu icons, Kali is the most confronting for most westerners! It must also be mentioned in all fairness that many Indians also find her iconography disconcerting. Mother kali is usually depicted dancing on the prostrate figure of Lord Shiva. She is black in colour with four arms. Her

hair is disheveled and her tongue lolls out of her mouth. She has four hands — holding a decapitated head, a sword, a bowl of blood which she drinks and the lower right hand displays the gesture of fearlessness. She wears a garland of human heads and her skirt is comprised of severed arms.



universes.

The **khadga** — sword represents discrimination and wisdom. Through discriminating between the real and the unreal, the truth and the untruth we gradually progress towards insight and wisdom which culminates in the elimination of the ego. Our spiritual practice does not consist of achieving anything but rather removing those conditioning factors which obscure the vision of the Divine which is our essential, natural state.

The **mundā-mālā** — garland of human heads represents all the false personalities that we embody and the masks that we wear — all of which hinder and obscure insight into our true natures.

Bearing in mind that Kali is the embodiment of Time and that impermanence and change are the 2 underpinning realities of the universe and our existence in it — the image of the Goddess attempts to portray the force of disintegration and confronts us with the reality of our own mortality.

#### Accoutrements

The **kapāla** — head she holds represents our **ahaṅkāra** *concept-of-self* — the ego. It is the concept of ourselves as separate and unique individuals which is the foundation upon which the edifice of ignorance and delusion is built. It is the pivot of our assumptive personal

The severed hands represent the countless actions **Karma** that we engage in to support our assumed identities and to fulfil our cravings and repulsions — all in search of the actualisation of "happiness projects" which never really bring the ultimate happiness expected.

The demon who was Kālī's nemesis on the field of battle was Rakta-bīja — the blood-seed demon, whose every drop of spilt blood generated another demon like him — representing our desires. Each and every desire that is fulfilled begets another desire just as strong. The only way to terminate this cycle is to decapitate the demon and to drink his blood. The drinking of the blood

symbolises the quaffing of all desires, cravings and attachments which are the basis for our existential suffering. The hand bestowing fearlessness indicates the need to overcome the greatest of all fears which is the fear of personal annihilation. By facing our fears and confronting the ultimate time-bound experience — death, we can achieve liberation from our spacio-temporal limitations and the cycle of rebirth and achieve Nirvana — the Supreme Bliss of "non-existence".

*Mahā-Kālī* is the personification of the universal power of transformation, the transcendent power of Time, the Great Goddess who rules unchallenged over the universe and all that is in it.

All processes in the universe are seen to be cyclic and can be divided in 10 phases connected with the symbolism attached to the mystical number 5 — the five aspects of Śiva and the five aspects of Śakti operate as day and night — the markers of Time.

*Mahā-Kālī* sub-divides herself into the 10 goddesses known as the *Mahā-vidyas* (ten objects of transcendent wisdom) which are the 10 aspects of the cycle of time — they're representative of the entire processes of projection and withdrawal of the universe. They are the underlying subtle energies of which the gross universe is the outer expression. *Impermanence* and *change* are the 2 underpinning realities of the universe and our existence in it, hence the Goddesses of Transcendental Wisdom are ultimately the powers of disintegration, but it is through the disintegration of all of our assumptive universes and everything that "appears" desirable and by facing what appears to us most fearful, (*mahā-bhaya*) the ultimate time-bound experience — death, that we can be liberated from bondage to the cycle of becoming and attain the ultimate goal of life, the limitless supreme bliss (*parama-ānanda*) of "non-existence" (*existence* is being conditioned by time and space.)

## The 1st Mahā-vidya

### **Mahā-Kālī the Power of Time. The Night-of-Eternity (Mahā-rātrī)**

Śiva, as *Mahā-kāla* is eternal time, he's the substratum from which arise all the secondary cycles of time and the energies which rule them — beginning with the cycles of evolution and involution of the cosmos and including all the cycles which govern everything from the sub-atomic particles to the galaxies, including the cycles which rule the existence of every single species of life, and it's each and every moment. The most representative division of the cycle of time is the alternation of day and night which are constant reminders of the rhythmic universal patterns of projection and dissolution of all that exists.

### **The Eternal Night**

The original Absolute state of the universe is an Eternal Night. The planetary movements of the Sun and the Moon which give rise to day and light by night, to our experience of divisible time, are only temporary phenomena implying a coming into being, existence in a location and some form of relativity. The psychological state of deep dreamless sleep (*turiya*) resembles to a degree the absolute quiescence of the Universe after dissolution (*pralaya*) when all existences return to the state of the Great Night (*Mahā-rātrī*). In this state of perfect integration nothing remains but the transcendent power of Time, *Mahā-Kālī*.



The term Śiva can be derived from the root *Sin*, which means “to sleep.” Hence Śiva is described as he in whom “all goes to sleep,” “he who puts all things to sleep,” etc. His power is represented by the eternal night in which all goes to sleep.

As absolute eternal time, Śiva is transcendent. He is the “Beyond the beyond” (*parat parah*) of the Upanishads. The absolute, indivisible night (*Mahā-rātrī*) is the abode of the Transcendent-power-of-Time (*Mahā-Kālī*).

From the ‘Hymn to the Night’ (Rātri Sukta of

the Rig Veda 10.127) we can understand that there are two divinities of night, the one experienced by mortal beings, the other by the divine Being; the one experienced by all the spheres and in relation to which all activities come daily to rest, the other in which the activity of divinity also comes to rest. This absolute night is the night of involution, inversion, and is the nature of the Power-of-Time (*Kālī*). Nothing then remains except the transcendent Immensity chequered with its power of illusion. This stage is the stage of Unmanifest-Nature (*avyakta*).

“Night has for its substance the power of illusion of the Immensity (*brahma-maya- atmika*); the nature of night is dissolution into supreme divinity (*paramesa-laya- atmika*). The principle presiding over this absolute night is celebrated as the goddess-of-the-spheres (*Bhuvanesi*).” (Devi Purana.)

“May the divinity of night (*Rātrī*), the transcendent power of consciousness (*cit-śakti*), be pleased, so that we may nestle in happiness like birds in their nests at night. Dwellers in the villages, their cows and horses, the birds of the air, men who travel on many a business, and jackals and wild beasts, all welcome the night and joyfully nestle in her; for to all beings misguided by the journey of the day she brings calm and happiness. Then all comes to rest. Even those beings who have never heard the name of the lady-of-the-spheres (*Bhuvanesvari*) come to her lap, where they sleep as happily as unconscious children. O merciful! O power of consciousness! O enfolding darkness! O divinity of Night! Overlook our deeds; take us away from the killers who harm us, the wolf that is sin, and the she-wolf that is never-ending desire. Remove us from lust and the other passions which rob us of wisdom and wealth, and be for us the ship of gladness that brings us to the other shore and leads us to beatitude.” (Karapatri, Sri Bhagavati tattva.”)

The word *rātrī* (night) is symbolically derived from the root *rā* “to give,” and is taken to mean “the giver” of bliss, of peace, of happiness.

## The Iconography of Kālī

“Most fearful, her laughter shows her dreadful teeth. She stands upon a corpse. She has four arms. Her hands hold a sword and a head and show the gestures of removing fear and granting boons. She is the auspicious divinity of sleep, the consort of Śiva.

“Naked, clad only in space, the goddess is resplendent. Her tongue hangs out. She wears a garland of heads. Such is the form worthy of meditation of the Power of Time, ‘Kālī, who dwells near the funeral pyres.- (Kālī Tantra. [496])

### The corpse

Kālī is represented as the supreme night, which devours all that exists. She therefore stands upon “non-existence,” — upon the corpse of the destroyed universe. The corpse is that of Śiva. So long as the power that gives life to the universe remains predominant it is favourable (*Śiva*), but when it is without strength it becomes as a corpse (*śava*). The lifeless body is indeed the symbol of whatever is left of the manifested universe when it reverts to the natural state of eternal time. At the time of universal dissolution (*pralaya*), the Power of Time, the power of destruction, is all that remains.

## **The fearful appearance**

At the end of the battle, when the warrior stands among the corpses of the vanquished enemy and remains alone on the field of battle, her appearance inspires fear and horror — exhausted covered in blood and gore. Who could dare to look her in the face? So terrible is Kālī. Her dread appearance is the symbol of her boundless power of annihilation.

## **The nakedness**

The universe which is projected from the Brahman and pervaded by the eternal power of time is also Its garb. “Having projected it [from himself], he entered into it.” (Taittiriya Upanisad 2.6.) When the universe is dissolved, the Power of Time remains without a veil, naked. Hence the Goddess is “clad in space” (*digambara*), having the vast emptiness of space as her only vesture.

## **The four arms**

The four arms of Kālī represent the four directions of space identified with the complete cycle of time — four being the number of perfection. Completeness is usually represented by the four corners. With her four arms, she stands as the symbol of the fulfillment of all and of the absoluteness of her dominion over all that exists. In the strict language of symbolism four arms always represent the idea of absolute dominion. This is also the meaning of the Christian cross.

## **The laughter**

The conqueror laughs in her triumph. That laughter is the expression of absolute dominion over all that exists. It mocks at those who, in the folly of their vanity, hope to escape dissolution. It ridicules all those who cling to material existence and clutch their paltry possessions craving to continue their feeble existence in a cosmos in the grip of change and transformation.

## **The sword**

The sword represents the power of destruction. The power of knowledge which cuts asunder the veil of ignorance and severs the bonds which bind us to our conditioned existence.

## **The severed head**

The head represents the ego (*ahamkara*) — the notion of individuality. The severed head in the hand of the Goddess reminds all living beings that there is no escape from the Omnipotence of Time (Kālī). All the ego personalities that we assume and take with such seriousness are all trifling and unsubstantial. The ultimate state requires their decapitation.

## **The gesture of fearlessness**

So long as there is existence, there is fear of destruction. Fear is inherent in all forms of existence; fear is the law of all that exists. “Out of fear of him fire burns; out of fear the sun shines.” (Katha Upanisad 2.3.3. [4971])

Every sentient being that is conditioned fears that which is beyond its limits of understanding. Only absolute time (*mahā-kala*) which pervades all things and has no limit knows no fear. The Upanishads say that he alone who exists “beyond the beyond” “exists without fear.” Kālī, the power of time that destroys all, is the embodiment of all fear, while she herself is beyond fear; she alone who is beyond fear can protect from fear those who invoke her. This is the meaning of the hand removing fear.

## **The gesture of generosity**

All the pleasures of the world are transient; all human joy is but a momentary and feeble reflection of our true nature, which is unbounded joy. But such perception cannot last and is soon veiled by pain. True happiness can only exist in that which is permanent. Only the Power of Time is permanent; it alone can grant happiness. Thus Kālī is the giver of bliss. This is represented by her

giving hand.

### **The garland skulls**

Life and death are inseparable aspects of our being. There is no life without death, no death without life. Hence there must be a common support for both life and death — Kālī is the supreme bliss which supports both and is the only refuge. She is the basis of all existence and non-existence. The garland of skulls represents impermanence and the traces which are left behind by the dead as reminders of our own mortality and impermanence. She also represents all the assumptive identities which we use to validate ourselves.

### **The funeral pyre**

Her dwelling place is the charnel ground illumined with the burning pyres of the world in destruction. A further reminder to us of the inevitability of our own physical dissolution and termination in the funeral pyre.

### **The black colour**

Black is not actually a “colour” but the absence of all light. All colours of the spectrum merge in the colour black. In the Power of Time all colours and light dissolve into darkness. As the embodiment of the tendency toward dispersion or obscuration (*tamas*), Kālī is depicted as black. All shapes return to shapelessness in the all-pervading darkness of the eternal night.

### **The lolling tongue**

Kālī’s gaping mouth and lolling tongue, her appearance and habits generally, are unquestionably repulsive to our ordinary sensibilities. In Tantra, this is probably precisely the point. What we experience as disgusting, polluted, forbidden, and gruesome is grounded in and conditioned by limited human (or cultural) consciousness. Our cultural and social conditioning has ordered and divided reality into categories that serve limited, ego-centred, selfish conceptions of how the world should be. Kālī in her crass way, de-constructs these categories, inviting us as her students to relax and open ourselves up to life in all its aspects — positive and negative, attractive and repulsive. She invites us to dare to taste the world in its most disgusting and forbidding manifestations in order to discover for ourselves its underlying unity and divinity, which is the Great Goddess herself.

### **The disheveled hair: pollution and dissolution**

Another striking feature of Kālī as with all the Mahā-vidyas is her long, loose, dishevelled hair. Hindu women always wear their hair well kept, braided or bound (as do brahmin men with long hair) — Loose hair is very uncommon — the only occasions being during the ritual impurity of menstruation in which it is forbidden to bind the hair and during mourning. The loose hair thus represents her as either menstruating — pre-creation; or mourning — post creation

Kālī is the ultimate suffragette openly and proudly displaying her disdain for social convention. She is totally liberated from all social convention, wild and uncontrolled in nature, and not bound to or limited by a male consort. She also displays other unconventional features — her nudity, her standing atop her husband or consort, her dwelling in cremation grounds, and her rude, lolling tongue, messy, loose, tangled hair emphasises her socially liberated character,

The Sacred texts describe eight principle manifestations of Kālī corresponding to the eight aspects of Śiva.

## The 2nd Mahā-vidya

### Tāra — the Star, the Power of Hunger. The Night-of-Anger (Krodha-rātrī)

“I meditate upon the Divine Mother of the three worlds, who is sitting on a white lotus situated in the centre of the waters enveloping the universe. In her left hands she holds a knife and a skull and, in her right hands, a sword and a blue lotus. Her complexion is blue, and she is decked with ornaments.... She is decorated with three beautiful serpents and has three red eyes. Her hair is bunched into a single plait of tawny colour. Her tongue is always moving, and her teeth and mouth appear terrible. She is wearing a tiger skin around her waist, and her forehead is decorated with ornaments of white bone. Sage Aksobhya, in the form of a serpent, is situated on her head. She is seated on the heart of a corpse and her breasts are hard. Thus should one meditate on Bhagavati Tārā who is the mistress of all three worlds.” (*Mantra Mahodadhi*)



The Star (Tārā) is the first force that arises in the *Bindu* [Golden-Embryo — Hiranya-garbhā], the cosmic location from which the universe evolves. As soon as the germ of life is planted, hunger arises — the embryo wants food. Only through the process of combustion of some fuel, some nutrients, can the universe survive and develop. This perpetual cosmic need to consume is the basis of the cosmic sacrifice, as well as of all the forms of existence and life. The nature of the Golden Embryo can well be said to be hunger and its power lies in the ability to devour. The name given to this pure and absolute, hunger is — “the Star” (Tārā).

“In the night of time, which is the state of universal dissolution, light [the first combustion, the first satisfied hunger] appears as a star. This light is the nature, the source, of all thought [for thought is also an energy, a combustion] and is the instrument of knowledge illuminating its object.” (Karapatri, Bhagavati tattva.)”

Although the word *tāra* means a star, the Tantras take its etymology to mean “that which leads to the other shore.” “She who brings us to the other shore (*Tārāti*) is Tārā.” — *Tārātyanaya sā tārā*. (Quoted in the Devi-sahasra-nama.)

Just as the nature of hunger is twofold - ravenous, all-consuming, driving, forcing before consumption, and the other pacified, peaceful and contented after consumption — Tārā also is depicted in a dual aspect, the one fierce, fearful, all-devouring, the other pacified and luminous. This duality is also the nature of the sun and of all beings.

“Hunger” [*kṣudha*] is defined as a desire to consume —food as well as knowledge, power, resources etc. Hunger [Tārā] and Time [Kālī] are inseparable since consumption is regulated by Time and Time consumes all things.

“In the Great Void, the sphere of the Egg-of-Immensity that is the universe (Brahmānda), there exist fifty forms of void. Five of these are the kingdom of the power-of-hunger (Tārā); the rest belong to the power-of-time (Mahā-Kālī).” (Quoted in Karapatri, Bhagavati tattva “)

In the cycle of day and night, Tārā represents early dawn, the hunger, the desire, that first appears after the calm of sleep, after the rule of Kālī. Hence Tārā rules from midnight to dawn. This is the Night-of-Anger (*Krodha-rātrī*) when every living thing prepares to destroy and devour other lives, other beings.

#### Tārā as the Void

In its peaceful aspect, the power of hunger is merely spoken of as a void.

“She is the transcendent form of the Void, the divider (kala), the Supreme Beauty (Mahā-sundari).

Beautiful, she commands the king of kings. Boundless, she is the ruler of the vast universe.

“She is the Great Void, the Star from which all was gradually evolved and which leads all toward liberation from the endless [cycle of life].” (Mahāsundari Tantra. [5021])

“All deities are aspects of the Void. The universe arose from the Void and dissolves into the Void. Seeing the Void as the goal of the universe, the sages, leaving a world of delusion (moha), dissolve into the Void, into the changeless shape of the Immensity.” (Hirananda Sastri Gaud, “Tārā-rahasya,” P. 225.)

So long as food is provided, so long as offerings are poured into the fearful solar fire, the cosmic sun is at peace, but if food is lacking the sun becomes the Fearful-Star (Ugra-Tārā) and devours the worlds.

### **Buddhist Tārā**

Jains and Buddhists also worship the goddess Tārā. For the Buddhists as for the Hindus hunger is eternal. In the Buddhist Scripture Tārā is represented as the power of Avalokitesvara. In the Tantras she is the consort of the Never-decaying (*Aksobhya*) which is an aspect of Śiva.

“O great goddess, without decaying, Śiva the lord of sleep, drank the *halāhala* poison, hence he is known as the Never- decaying (*Aksobhya*). The transcendent power of illusion, ever in lustful dalliance with him, is the Star, Tārā.” (Tārā Tantra.1 )

### **Iconography of Tārā**

The Hindu Tārā is always depicted in her fearful form with four arms entwined with poisonous snakes and serpents in her matted hair. She holds a head and a chalice, for in her fearsome mood she drinks blood, the sap of the world.

“Standing firmly with her left foot forward resting on a corpse, she laughs loudly -transcendent. Her hands hold a sword, a blue lotus, a dagger, and a begging bowl. She raises her war cry, hum! Her matted tawny hair is bound with poisonous blue snakes. Thus the terrifying Tārā destroys the unconsciousness of the three worlds and carries them on her head [to the other shore].”

“She shines upon a white lotus arisen from the water, pervading the world. She holds in her hands scissors, a sword, a skull, and a blue lotus. Her ornaments are snakes, which form a girdle, earrings, a garland, armlets, bracelets, anklets. She has three red eyes, fearful tawny tresses, a wagging tongue, fearful teeth. Round the hips she wears the skin of a panther. She wears a diadem made of bleached bones. One should meditate on Tārā, the mother of the three worlds, who is seated on the heart of a corpse, her face resplendent with the power of the Never-decaying (*Akshobhya*).” (Tārā Tantra)

### **The Worship of Tārā**

The Hindu Tantras specify that the goddess is to be worshiped according to the Buddhist ritual. Otherwise her worship remains fruitless.

“The proper way to worship me is the Buddhist way. O Tormentor of Men! That way one people alone know; none other knows its inner significance.” (*Lalita-upakhyana*.)

## **The 3rd Mahā-vidya**

**Tripura-sundari — the beauty-of-the three-realms, Perfection. The Divine-Night (Divya-rātrī)**

“I salute the auspicious goddess who shines like the orb of an infant sun, has four arms and three eyes, and holds a noose, an elephant hook, an arrow, and a bow.” (Sodasi Tantra)

The number used to represent the totality of perfection is 16. In human beings sixteen years represent the age of accomplished perfection, after which decline sets in — it is the age of the fullness of vigour and libido. There are fifteen days (tithis) in the complete lunar cycle from the new moon to the full moon. The 15 day is either the full moon or the new moon. 16 therefore represents that which is full within time and yet beyond time. The Girl-of-Sixteen (Shodashi) rules over all that is perfect, complete, beautiful.

After dawn, after the hour of the Star (*Tārā*), comes the hour of perfection. The young sun has risen in its fullness; the sun is the source of all life on this planet and is numerologically connected with the number 5 and with the five elements and is represented by the five-faced Śiva. Just after dawn its fierceness has not yet appeared. It seems gentle, bright, auspicious (*Śiva*). In the morning sun men worship the Progenitor, the principle that gives life to the three worlds and to all the mortals and immortals.

The Girl-of-Sixteen, the power of Śiva as the ruler of the three worlds, is, according to the Sodashi Tantra, identified with the Beauty-of-the-Three-Cities (*Tripura-sundari*), said to be the light radiating from the three eyes of Śiva to illumine the worlds. Hence she is “the Girl-of-Sixteen in whom the three forms of light unite.”

She is also known as Lalita. The wise say, “The word *Lalita* has eight meanings, namely brilliance, manifestation, sweetness, depth, fixity, energy, grace and generosity; are the eight human qualities.” The Kama-Shastra says:— *Lalita* means erotic actions and also tenderness; as she has all the above-mentioned qualities she is called *Lalita*. It is said also, “Thou art rightly called Lalita for thou hast nine divine attendants [in the Sri cakra,] and your bow is made of sugar-cane, your arrows are flowers, and everything connected with you is lovely (commentary on *Lalita sahasranama*).

Indra, the wielder of the thunderbolt, is a solar aspect of Śiva, hence he is sometimes identified with the Girl-of-Sixteen. “*Indra is Sodasi*” (Satapatha Brahmana 4.2.5.14.)

As a form of the eternal night, *Sodasi* is the Divine-Night (*Divya-rātri*), the night of perfection.



## The 4th Mahā-vidya

**Bhuvaneśvari — the Lady of the Spheres, Knowledge. The Night- of- Realisation (*Siddha-rātri*)**

“With the moon as her diadem, with large breasts and three eyes, smiling, she shines like the risen sun. Her hands grant boons, allay fears, and hold an elephant hook and a noose. I bow to the fear-inspiring lady of the spheres.” (*Bhuvanesvari Tantra*.)

After the rising of the Sun after the gentle dawn period of the day and of projection of the universe, the Girl-of-Sixteen (Shodashi) makes way for the resplendent Lady-of-the-spheres (*Bhuvaneshvari*), consort of the Three-eyed Śiva (*Tryambaka*). Creation now becomes a powerful flow, a constant evolving, over which rules the Sovereign Goddess. As the ruler of the universe she is also known as the Queen-of-Queens (*Raja-rajesvari*).

*Bhuvaneśvari* is also associated and identified with the earth and the universe in general, and the underlying energy that brings it into being and pervades it. She embodies the characteristic dynamics and constituents that make up the world and that lend creation its distinctive character. In this sense she is identified with the *mahā-bhutas* (the basic physical elements) and *prakrti* (primordial nature).

The lady of the spheres is represented with various attributes. In the lower of her right hands she holds a vessel, in the upper right hand a mace, in the upper left hand a shield, in the lower left hand the bilva fruit, called the fruit-of-Fortune (*Sri-phala*). On her head are a serpent, a linga, and a yoni. Preciously coloured like molten gold, the all-powerful goddess wears a divine garland and gold ornaments.

The fruit in her hand shows her as the giver of the fruit of actions.

Her club is the ‘power to act’ or ‘power of dispersion’ (*viksepa śakti*). The ‘power of knowing’ (*Jñana śakti*) is her shield; the ‘tendency toward liberation, toward the Fourth stage’ (*turiya vrtti*), is the vessel which contains the sap (*rasa*) of existence, that is, delight in the Self. The linga is the male principle (*purusa tattva*), the yoni represents Nature (*prakrti tattva*). The serpent is ‘Time’ (*kala tattva*). (Karapatri, Sri Bhagavati tattva.”)



As a form of the eternal night Bhuvanesvari is the Night-of-Realisation (*Siddha-rātri*), the veil made of knowledge which surrounds the universe.

## The 5th Mahā-vidya

### Chinnamasta — the Beheaded, the Power of the Sacrifice. The Night- of- Courage (Vira-rātri)

“Her left foot forward in battle, she holds her severed head and a knife. Naked, she drinks voluptuously the stream of the blood-nectar flowing from her beheaded body. The jewel on her forehead is tied with a serpent. She has three eyes. Her breasts are adorned with lotuses. Inclined toward lust, she sits erect above the god of love, who shows signs of lustfulness. She looks like the red China rose. Her eyes are blue.” (Chinnamasta Tantra). [Lord Śiva said] - “I shall describe Chinnamasta. During the Krta Yuga on the best of mountains — Kailasa, I and *Mahāmaya* were engaged in *Mahāvrata* (sexual intercourse). When I ejaculated, she appeared as *Candika*, of fearsome visage, and from her body two Śaktis emerged who became her attendants — they were known as *Dakini* and *Varnini*. One day Candika with two attendants went to the bank of the Puspabhadra River. At midday her hungry attendants said to Candika, “Please give us food.” smiling and auspicious Candika heard their request, looked in all directions [finding no feed] she severed her own head. With the left bloodstream, she gratified Dakini, with the right one, she gratified Varnini and from the center one, she drank own blood. After exhibiting her pastime in this way, she replaced her head on her torso and assumed her original form. At dusk, they returned home. When I saw her anaemic appearance, I suspected that she had been abused by someone. This infuriated me. From this anger a portion of me arose and became known *Krodha Bhairava*. (Pranatoshini Tantra)

Once the progress of the day or the process of world unfoldment has reached a state of stability, it continues to exist, depending for its sustenance on destruction, on burning, on consuming. The cosmic sacrifice (*yajna*) expresses this process of universal metabolism, and the ritual sacrifices (*yajnas*) are performed with the intention of harmonising and co-operating with the cosmic process. *Yajna* is the exchanging of energies between differing levels.

The aspect of Śiva which presides over the cosmic sacrifice is the Headless (*Kabandha*). The Vedic ritual of sacrifice consists in beheading the victim — “The sacrifice is indeed beheaded.” (Satapatha Brahmana). Hence the Shakti of the sacrifice is depicted as the “Beheaded-one

(*Chinnamasta*). At the end of the ritual sacrifice there is a ceremony called the “joining of the head” (*siro-sandhana*), in which the head is symbolically reattached to the body of the victim. This represents the consummation of the cycle, the ultimate resurrection of all forms, without which the meaning of the sacrifice would remain incomplete.

The beginning of life is the sex act in which an offering of semen is made into the uterus. The womb is symbolic of the fire-pit and the offering of ghee is the semen. In the animal sacrifice the full offering is the blood and the animal is consumed. When seen as a participation in a perpetual cosmic process, the feeding upon life can become a means of great realisation, instead of being merely an unconscious act of self-nourishment. The Tantras warn that the *sādhaka* should only partake of meat from animals that have been duly consecrated and sacrificed, and the first fruits of all produce should be offered to the deity.

*Chinnamasta* rules over the five Great-Sacrifices (*pancha-mahā-yajnas*). Every human born is liable to 5 debts (*runas*) and our duty as conscious humans is to discharge these 5 debts at every occasion for the entirety of our lives on the planet. The five Great Sacrifices are nothing but the continual expressing of gratitude to all those who facilitate our existence. They are:—

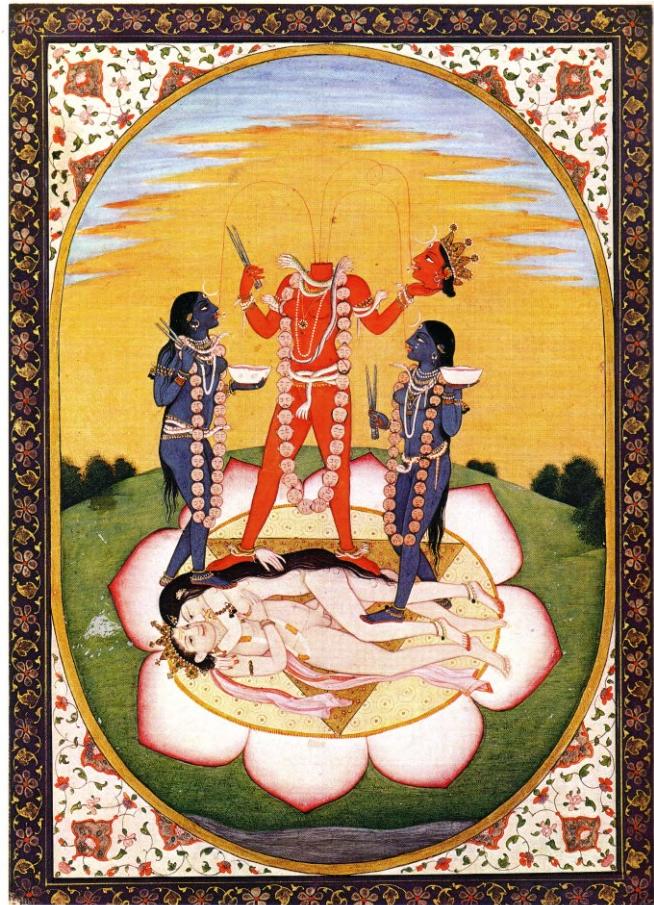
*pitr yajna* — to Ancestors - parental responsibilities *deva yajna* — to gods, the cosmic forces which maintain the harmony of the universe. *brahma yajna* — to Supreme through the study of the teachings of the sages. *manusya yajna* — to fellow human beings - societal responsibilities. *bhuta yajna* — to the animals and elements - environmental responsibilities.

The myth of beheading is also found associated with Vishnu in the Shatapatha Brahmana. Vishnu's head is cut off and it ascends into the sky to become the sun. The solar radiation (*pravargya*) is also a constant offering to the earth. The very life-essence of the sun, poured into the earth so that it and all beings upon it may live. The solar energy is the essence of all food (*anna*). This

outpouring of solar radiation is compared to a perpetual beheading of the sun and as such the Beheaded represents the life-giving and life-destroying power of the Sun.

In Buddhism Chinnamasta is called the Power-of-the-Thunderbolt (Vajra- yogini). Her philosophical form is *Prajna-paramita*.

As a form of the eternal night *Chinnamasta* is the Night-of-Courage (*Vira- rātri*) when the victim is brought to the altar of sacrifice.



## The 6th Mahā-vidya

### *Bhairavi, the Fearful Goddess, the Power of Death. The Night-of-Death (Kala-rātri)*

“Softly smiling, you shine with a crimson glow that may be compared to a thousand newly risen suns. You wear a silken veil and a garland of skulls. Blood smears your breast. Three voluptuous eyes adorn

your lotus face; the moon is your diadem. Your lotus hands show the gestures of victory, of wisdom, the granting of boons, and the allaying of fear.” (Tripura-Bhairavi Tantra.)

*Chinnamasta* represents the end of things, the spectacular moment when the victim is sacrificed, beheaded; life, existence, comes to an abrupt end.

But this sudden end is only the culmination of a process that began long before. Destruction begins from the very first moment of existence. Death is the ever present reality operating in everything. This aspect of death is called the “perpetual-destruction” (*nitya-pralaya*).



The southern direction is dedicated to Yama, the God of death the southern fire (dakshina agni) is the fire of destruction. The north is dedicated to Soma, the “essence of life,” of love (*sneha tattva*), the nourishing ambrosia of immortality. In Saiva theology the Southern-Image (*Daksina-murti*) or the Time-of-the-Fearful (*Kala-Bhairava*) is associated with the South.

The *shakti* of death and destruction is the Fearful-Goddess, *Bhairavi*, also called the Fearful- Goddess-of-the-Three-Cities (*Tripura-Bhairavi*). All that the lady-of- the-spheres (*Bhuvanesvari*) preserves and nurtures, the Fearful Goddess relentlessly destroys. She is the Tangible-Demoness (*Apara-Dakini*), always our constant companion lurking nearby.

*Bhairavi*’s presence is found in self-destructive habits that we possess — eating tamasic food, alcohol, smoking, drugs etc. She is further strengthened by the destructive emotions like anger, jealousy, hatred, resentment etc.

## The 7th Mahā-vidya

### Dhūmavati — the Smoky One, the Power of Poverty. The Night- of-Frustration (*Daruna-rātrī*)

“She appears as a woman of unhealthy complexion, restless, wicked, tall, with a dirty robe and dishevelled hair. With gaps in her teeth, she looks like a widow, and holds in her hand a winnowing basket. Her eyes seem cruel, her hands tremble, her nose is long. She behaves deceitfully and is sly in her looks. Insatiably hungry and thirsty, she inspires fear and is the instigator of quarrels.” (Dhumavati Tantra.)



After death the body is consigned to the funeral pyre, our entire subjective, assumptive universe ends in smoke; hence the power of ultimate destruction is called the Smoky-One (*Dhumavati*). She is the *shakti* that destroys the structure of all things, (structure is ruled over by the male principle whereas process is the feminine energy), hence she is called a widow (*vidhava*). Nothing is left for her to own, hence she is utterly destitute. She is the goddess-of-poverty (*Daridra*), of frustration, of despair, identified with Mis-fortune (*A-laksmi*) and with the goddess-of-disease- and misery (*Nirrti*).

Her presence can be seen in the destitute, the beggars, the lepers, the diseased. She dwells in the wounds-of-the-earth (*ksata-viksata-prthivi*), in deserts, ruined houses, tatters, hunger, thirst, widowhood, quarrels, the mourning of children, the battle

field etc..

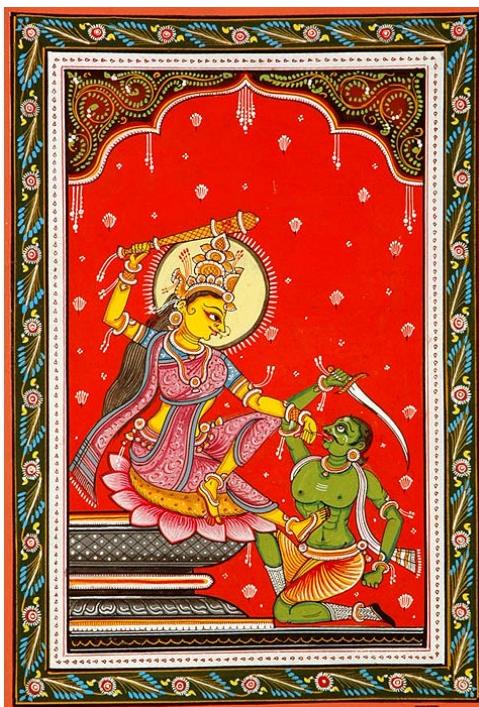
*Dhumavati* rules over the rainy season which lasts for four months, during which the life-giving solar light is hidden by the evil water-spirit (*asura-apya-prana*). This corresponds in the cosmic cycle to the night of the gods when the spirits of darkness rule. The night of *Dhumavati* is the Night-of-Death (*Kala-rātrī*) — during the 4 months of the monsoon no public ritual can be performed, there are no pilgrimages, no festivals, no marriages, no initiation. At the end of the rainy period the rule of light returns and the festival of lights (*dipavali*) takes place.

## The 8th Mahā-vidya

***Bagala mukhi* — The Deceitful, Crane-headed, the Power of Cruelty. The Second Night-of-Courage (*Vira-rātrī*)**

In the middle of the ocean is a pavilion of jewels with an altar inside it. On the altar is a lion throne on which the goddess Bagala-mukhi is seated. Her complexion is completely yellow, perfectly yellow, and she wears a yellow dress, yellow ornaments, and a yellow garland. I call to mind she who holds the tongue of the enemy in her left hand and a raised club in her right hand.

She has assumed a serious mood and is maddened with intoxication. Her brilliance reflects the golden hue of her body. She has four arms and three eyes and is seated on a lotus. On her forehead is the crescent moon, which is yellow in colour. She wears yellow clothes, has high, firm breasts, and wears golden earrings. (Brhat Tantrasara)



An aspect of our human psychology that we very quickly learn to repress is a subtle desire to kill other living beings — a desire to destroy all others but ourselves; the forbidden pleasure that we feel when hurting another — something we don't like to admit to. This desire to kill, to torture, is present to some degree in the psyche of everyone. This repressed destructive desire unconsciously motivates many of our actions in day to day life. In the iconography of Tantra this aspect of mind-force is represented as a woman with the head of a crane, the placid, graceful crane being considered the most deceitful of all creatures.

*Bagalamukhi* is also known as *Pitambara-devi* (The goddess garbed in yellow) she presides over all the subtle forms of killing. She is more than any of the other *Mahā-vidyas* the presiding goddess of the supernormal yogic powers known as “*siddhis*” which can either be used for universal good (“white-magic”) or subjective self-agrandisement (“black-magic”). She is the cosmic force which incites men to kill and to torture one another.

A demon named Madan undertook austerities won the boon of *vak siddhi*, according to which anything he said about. He abused this *siddhi* by killing people. Enraged by his mischief the gods worshiped *Bagalamukhi*. She stopped the demon's rampage by taking hold of his tongue and stilling his speech. Before she could kill him, however, he asked to be worshiped with her, and she relented. That is why he is depicted with her.

“I bow to the two-armed goddess who with the right hand grasps the tongue of her enemy and with her left hand tortures him. She holds a mace and is clad in yellow.” (Bagalamukhi Tantra.)

*Bagala-mukhi* is also strongly associated with sexual desire and pleasure — particularly that of the sado-masochistic type. Several of her epithets in her thousand-name hymn associate her directly

with *kama*, “sexual desire,” or the god of sexual desire, Kama-deva. She is called, for example: She Who Dwells Where There Is Sexual Desire, Who Likes Sexual Desire, Whose Form Is Sexual Desire, Whose Eyes Are Full of Desire, Who Promotes Sexual Desire, and Who Takes Pleasure in Sexual Play.”

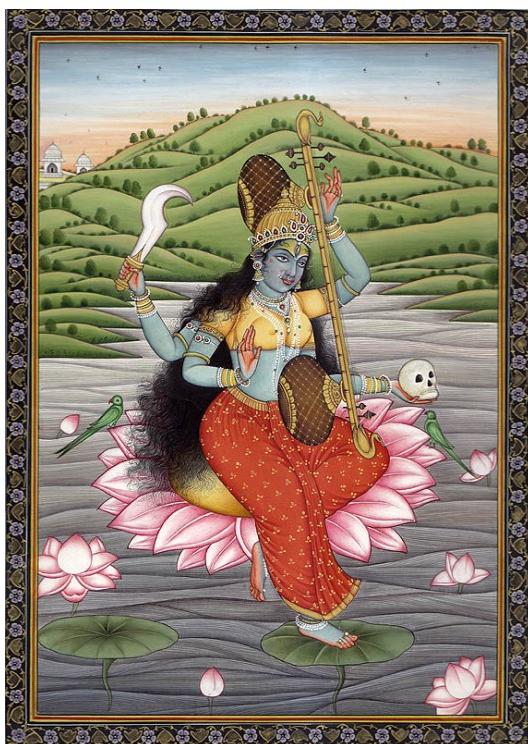
Another string of epithets associates and identifies her with the female sexual organ: She Whose Form is the Yoni, Who dwells in the Yoni, Whose form is the Lingam and Yoni, Who Has a Garland of Yonis, Who is adorned with Yonis, Who Enjoys the Union of the Lingam and Yoni, Who Is Worshiped with the Lingam and Yoni, and Who is Absorbed with the Lingam and Yoni.

Her consort is the One-faced (Ekavakra) Rudra.

The night of *Bagala-mukhi* is identical to that of Chinnamasta. It is the Night-of-Courage (*Vira-rātrī*), the time of suffering.

## The 9th Mahā-vidya

**Mātangi — the Elephant Power, the Power of Domination, the Outcaste Goddess. The Night-of-Delusion (Moha-rātrī)**



She is seated on a corpse. Her clothes and all her ornaments are red. She wears a garland of ganja seeds. She is sixteen years old and has full breasts. She holds a skull and a sword in her two hands. She should be offered leftovers [uccista].

She is blue in colour and has the disc of the moon on her forehead. She has three eyes, is seated on a jewelled throne, and is adorned with jewelled ornaments. She has a very thin waist, and her breasts are round and firm. She has a smiling face and holds a noose, a sword, a goad, and a club in her four hands.’

One version of Mātangi’s origin is found in the *Pranatoshni-tantra*. Once upon a time, Parvati was seated on Śiva’s lap. She said to him that he always granted her wishes and that now she had a desire to return to her father’s home for a visit. Would he consent to her visiting her father, Himalaya, she asked? Śiva was not happy about granting her this wish but eventually complied, saying that if she did not come back in a few days, he would, go there himself to ask for her return. Parvati’s mother sent a crane to carry Parvati back

to her family home. When she did not return for some days, Śiva disguised himself as an ornament maker and went to Himalaya’s house. He sold shell ornaments to Parvati and then, seeking to test her faithfulness, asked that she have sex with him as his payment. Parvati was outraged at the merchant’s request and was ready to curse him, but then she discerned with her yogic intuition that the ornament vendor was really her husband, Śiva. Concealing her knowledge of his true identity, she replied: “Yes, fine, I agree. But not just now.”

Sometime later, Parvati disguised herself as a huntress and went to Śiva’s home, where he was preparing to do evening meditation. She danced there, near Manasa Lake. She wore red clothes, and her body was lean, her eyes wide, and her breasts large. Admiring her, Śiva asked: “Who are you?” She replied: “I am the daughter of a Cāndāla. I’ve come here to do penance.” Then Śiva said:— “I am the one who rewards those who do penance.” Saying this, he took her hand, kissed her, and

prepared to make love to her. While they made love, Śiva himself was changed into a Caṇḍāla. At this point he recognized the Caṇḍāla woman as his wife Parvati. After they had made love, Parvati asked Śiva for a boon, which he granted. Her request was this:— “As you [Śiva] made love to me in the form of a Caṇḍālinī [Caṇḍāla woman], this form will last forever and will be known as *Uccista-Caṇḍālinī*.

The regal elephant is the mount of Indra, king of the gods as well as of temporal kings. It is the symbol of the power of domination. After the terror of the night appears the reassuring sunlight. The demons are defeated; *Mātaṅgī*, the Elephant power, establishes the rule of peace, of calm, of prosperity. The day is, however, a dream, a mirage that appears in the eternal night. As a form of night, *Mātaṅgī* is therefore the Night-of-Delusion (*Moha-rātri*).

*Mātaṅgī* is associated with “left-overs” and indeed prefers pollution. Those who perform sādhana of *Mātaṅgī* must offer her left-over food and worship her after eating without washing. Even the highly “polluting” menstrual state is said to please this goddess. *Uccista Mātaṅgī* as the embodiment of the ritually polluted is the goddess by means of whom one can directly come to terms with pollution. As such she is very empowering and liberating. She also has a strong association with forests and jungles.

## The 10th Mahā-vidya

### Kamalā — The Lotus-Goddess, the Power of Wealth. The Night-of-Splendour (Mahā-rātri)

“With a golden complexion, bathed in the stream of ambrosia flowing from golden vessels held by the trunks of four white elephants, she looks like the abode of snow, the Himalaya. Her hands grant boons, allay fear, and hold two lotuses. She has a brilliant diadem. Her hips, like ripe fruits, are loosely draped in a silken garment. We bow to her who stands upon a lotus.” (Kamala Tantra)

When Everlasting-Siva (*Sada-siva*) takes over the function of Vishnu and sustains the world then *Kamala* becomes his consort. She is the embodiment of all that is materially and spiritually desirable, the exact counterpart of the Smoky-One (*Dhumavati*). The signs of the zodiac associated with these 2 goddesses are in opposition. *Kamala* rules over the auspicious nakshatra Rohini in Taurus, giver of wealth, while *Dhumavati* rules over the nakshatra Jyestha in the sign Scorpio which brings poverty.

Kamala is the power inherent in prosperity. As the energy of preservation she represents the potential for universal well-being that can only be accomplished through the correct utilisation of wealth. She is the only one of the goddesses who is totally benevolent and compassionate. In fact coming last in the list of Maha-vidyas she represents the “normative” state of what most people are comfortable;

with Kali is that which is least comforting. She represents material well-being, comfort, the familiar. As the preserving energy she bestows stability and security — she represents the very state of mind which contributes to further continuity in Samsara whereas Kali represents the Liberating force. Kamala consciousness is what one seeks to restrain, overcome and finally transcend.

The aspect of the eternal night corresponding to Kamala bears the same name, *Maha-ratri*, as the night of Kali but is interpreted to mean the Night of Splendour.

